

# MIKE SHAYNE

JANUARY 1981

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## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**The New Mike Shayne Short Novel**  
**BLACK LOTUS**  
by Brett Halliday

Book Reviews  
by John Ball

**A Novelet**  
**THE MAN IN THE HUBERLIN PLACE**  
by Jerry Jacobson

**Short Stories by**  
Hal Charles  
Jay Fox  
Richard Grant  
Carl Henry Rathjen  
Carter Swart

**THE WORLD OF  
MYSTERY FANDOM**  
by Stephen Mertz

**MIKE SHAMUS cartoon**  
by Fred Fredericks



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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

### NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

BY BRETT HALLIDAY

*Shayne fired, but the Ninja was faster. As the wicked blade flashed toward his face, the detective threw himself to one side. The blade missed by inches. Tired and beat up as he was, Shayne knew it was only a matter of time until one of the killing strokes found him! . . . . . 6*

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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY

## MAKERS

**RICHARD GRANT** (*Bedroom Set*) tells us:

*I'm thirty years old, Public Relations Manager for the Denver and Colorado Convention and Visitors Bureau, and I don't have any mirrors in my bedroom. Incidentally, the story does not take place in Colorado, which is a wonderful place to visit or attend a conference. I've written numerous outdoor, nature, travel and history articles for a variety of publications.*

In 1976 **CARTER SWART** (*The Right Bait*) contracted Guillain-Barre Syndrome, a rare paralytic disease of the spinal cord, which paralyzed him from the neck down. With ice cream sticks taped to his fingers for support, he retaught himself to type. It took him four hours to type one page. But his efforts paid off — with slowly increasing recovery and freelance sales. Inspired by his wife Bonnie (a gifted artist specializing in oils and pastels of thoroughbred horses) and his three daughters, Carter has returned to his managerial job at the Bank of America in Ventura, California.

Despite his working schedule and the chores attendant to living on a one-acre olive grove, he manages to turn out excellently crafted stories like the one in this issue of MSMM.

JAY FOX (*Gittin By*) says:

*I was born in San Jose, CA. where I lived, went through college and worked until last summer when my wife Joan and I began a whole new way of life on eight acres of undeveloped ranch land in rural Trinity County. We are now two miles from the nearest telephone, sixty miles from the nearest freeway or stoplight . . . and we love it!*

*I've worked at the obligatory odd-ball jobs writers seemingly must have to fill their biographies and survive hard times — a life guard and swimming instructor, a skip tracer for a loan company, a forklift driver, and guillotine operator. Yes, a guillotine . . . a machine used to cut large sheets of microfilm into fiche cards.*

*I worked fifteen years in the 16mm film business, first writing and later producing educational and industrial motion pictures — an interesting, but not terribly rewarding occupation.*

*I sold my first story to Trapped, a blood & gut pulp in the long defunct Crestwood chain. I wrote steadily for them for several years, under several different names. I've also sold some confessions and lurid sex fiction whenever the profits from producing educational films went from small, to meager, to none.*

*I've now sold my film making equipment and invested the money in fence wire for a larger hog pen — and in a carbon ribbon Selectric II, that for the sake of editors whose eyes, like mine, are not as keen as when I began with a frayed ribbon in an old portable with keys that seemed to have been lubricated with tar.*

CARL HENRY RATHJEN (*Not in the Script*) has written fifteen novels, most of them juveniles, including two based on The Waltons TV series. He has appeared frequently in national magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post, Argosy, and Boys Life. His stories have been included in numerous anthologies and have been reprinted in England, Australia, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, France, and Belgium. ●

# **BLACK LOTUS**

**by BRETT HALLIDAY**

**SHEPARD WONG WAS AFRAID.**

That fact showed up in the jerky movements of his hands, the constant flitting back and forth of his eyes, the fine patina of perspiration that coated his forehead. Wong was a very frightened man, even though he was in the security of his own apartment, and a man's home is supposed to be his castle.

But there was no getting around the facts.

Wong's hand shook just slightly, and the knife slipped, slicing across the pad of one finger. A thin red line started to show before Wong stuck the finger in his mouth and sucked on it momentarily. He put the knife down and decided to wait until later to make himself an egg salad sandwich. He was too nervous to eat now, anyway.

Wong was a thin man, of medium height, with sallow skin, dark hair, and a narrow moustache. He walked quickly across the room to a window, pulling the curtain back slightly, and peered out at the Miami night. Biscayne Bay was nearby, and Wong could see the lights of Miami Beach across the expanse of water. It was a beautiful night in Miami, but Wong was in no mood to appreciate it.

Having one's life threatened left little room for thoughts of warm breezes and swaying palm trees.

Wong let the curtain fall shut and swung away from the window. He paced first one way and then the other around the little living room. Finally, heaving a deep, heart-felt sigh, he sat down and listlessly picked up that day's edition of the *Miami Daily News*. Maybe if he read about all the terrible things that were bound to be happening in the world, it would get his mind off his own troubles.

The first item his eye fell on was a front-page story by-lined Timothy Rourke. The headline read SHAYNE NABS KILLERS, and the story began:

*Michael Shayne, the prominent Miami private detective, has again cracked a tough case, this one a double-barreled job featuring several killers. Police have arrested four persons in Sarasota and three in Miami, charging all of them with either murder or attempted murder. It was Shayne's work on the case that uncovered two six-month old killings, one of a circus performer in Sarasota, the other of a wealthy young matron in Bal Harbour. As usual, Shayne had to put his own life on the line to solve the case, this time facing, of all things, a maddened gorilla . . .*

Wong read through the rest of the story rapidly. His pulse quickened as he scanned the lines, but the excitement wasn't due to Timothy Rourke's stirring prose. What Wong was feeling was the first, faint

surges of hope, something he had almost forgotten how to feel.

Somehow, he knew that this man could help him. Indeed, it was very possibly that the only man in Miami who could help him was this redheaded private detective, Michael Shayne.

Wong threw the paper down and stood up, then hurried across the room to a writing desk that sat in a corner. He pulled pen and paper from the drawer in it and sat down to write. The pen moved rapidly on the paper.

*Dear Mr. Shayne,*

*You don't know me, but my name is Shepard Wong. I am in trouble, and I would like to hire you to help me. I will visit you at your office in the morning, but tonight I am writing this letter because I fear for my life —*

Wong broke off abruptly and laid the pen down. He thought he had heard something, and his dark eyes darted around the room rapidly. Nothing appeared to be out of order. The place was the same shabbily genteel furnished apartment it had always been. There was the worn sofa, the overstuffed armchair, the slightly battered black-and-white television set in the other corner . . . Nothing out of the ordinary. Wong stood up slowly.

He walked cautiously toward the tiny kitchen. The door was open, and he peeked through it, tension making his body quiver. There was no one there, just the remains of the sandwich he had tried to make for his late supper. The hands of the clock on the kitchen wall stood at just after midnight, and Wong could hear the hum of its motor as he stood in the silence of the apartment.

Taking a deep breath, he walked over to the door of the bedroom and looked through it. There was nothing, nothing whatsoever to be alarmed about. The windows were locked, the curtains drawn —

At least he thought the windows were locked.

More droplets of sweat broke out on Wong's brow, even though it wasn't hot in the apartment. He was almost sure he had locked the windows in the bedroom, but memory was a funny thing. The more he thought about it, the less sure he was.

It would take only a moment to walk across the bedroom and check the windows, but that would have meant opening the curtains, and for some reason, Wong couldn't bring himself to do it.

He was being cowardly and silly, he told himself. There was nothing to worry about, not here and now, and he had heard no suspicious sounds. It was all his imagination, the delusions of a fevered brain.

Besides, he was on the fourth floor, and the old building didn't have



a fire escape at his window. There was no way anyone could invade his apartment through the windows. The only creatures who could get to it were birds.

Wong returned to the living room, went to the desk and sat down again. He picked up the pen and resumed writing.

*If I do not come to your office, you will know that something has happened to me, and that I wish you to find out what and to see that justice is done. I promise that I will soon be able to pay you quite well...*

By this time, Wong was so absorbed in what he was writing that he didn't hear the slight whisper of a rope brushing against one of the bedroom windows. It is doubtful he would have heard it anyway, even if he had been listening, so quiet was it. A moment passed, and then the window began to move, slowly and smoothly. Its ascent was almost noiseless. Long minutes passed as it raised, but what was lost in time was gained in silence.

Wong was hunched over the writing desk, his back to the bedroom door, so he didn't see the curtains move. They were pushed to the side, and then a darker patch of shadow moved through them and dropped lightly to the floor with its threadbare carpet. The shadow slid toward the patch of light that marked the entrance to the living room.

IT WAS ONLY THE CREAK OF AN ANCIENT FLOORBOARD underneath the carpet that gave Wong any warning. His head jerked up, and his fingers convulsively crumpled the paper that he had spread out on the desk. He started to turn in his chair.

There was a whisper of sound as something cut through the air. Light flickered off the shiny object as it flew toward Shepard Wong and he threw himself convulsively to one side. The sound of the object hitting the desk came to his ears as he half-fell to the floor. His eyes widened in terror as he saw what it was.

There was a shiny metal star stuck in the side of the desk, one of its sharp points imbedded deeply in the wood — a *shuriken*!

"Yaaahhh!"

A nightmare in black was rushing at him with blinding speed. Wong rolled, fear making his muscles and nerves react faster than they ever had in his life. A small but deadly mace slashed into the floor. Wong leaped to his feet and lunged toward the light switch. His only hope lay in darkness.

His hand slapped the switch, plunging the room into night. He could hear the harsh breathing of the invader. If he had a weapon, he might

have been able to fight back, but there was nothing. His gun was in the bedroom, and he knew that he would never be able to reach it before the other man was on him.

Wong felt the wall behind him, and then he knelt suddenly, fingers groping in the darkness for the floor. He found what he was looking for and worked frenziedly for a moment, even though he knew the crackling of the paper would give away his position to the attacker. There was movement in the air, and he jerked blindly away.

Something clanged against the wall, and there was a guttural curse in a language Wong recognized as Japanese. He scurried away from the sound. He remembered the knife in the kitchen suddenly, the knife he had cut himself with and then left lying on the counter. If he could reach it, he might at least die with honor.

He knew his way around the apartment, having lived there for all of the ten years he had been in Miami since leaving San Francisco. That was one small advantage he had over the other man. He ran toward where he knew the kitchen to be, and he heard rapid footsteps behind him.

His fingers were scrabbling along the counter, seeking the knife desperately, when the light suddenly came on, all but blinding him. He saw that he was still a foot away from the knife.

He never got the chance to grab for it.

There was a flicker in the air again, and Wong felt a sudden pain in his wrist that burned with an ice-cold pain. He lifted his arm, saw his hand remain on the counter, and screamed.

"You are a fool, little man," the figure in black said, and the words were in Chinese now. Wong's parents had often spoken their native tongue at home, even though they lived in California and were Americans for the time their son had been born.

So he had no trouble understanding his death sentence.

"Go to your death peacefully, fool. The Black Lotus is all, the Black Lotus has spoken. You die for your treachery."

Wong looked at the blood on the counter and shook his head dazed. His wrist had almost quit hurting now, and the pain hadn't been extremely bad. So why was there so much blood?

The Ninja was still talking to him, but Wong was having a harder time hearing him now. None of this made sense. He was an American citizen, had been all of his life. He didn't speak Chinese well, didn't even care that much for Chinese food, despite his employment in the restaurant. He didn't even celebrate Chinese New Year anymore.

But there was a Ninja standing here in the kitchen of his apartment, dressed all in black and holding a wicked, curved sword that had crim-

son drops falling from its blade.

This was death.

Oriental death.

Wong started to sway slightly, unsteady on his feet now. The scarlet tide was still pumping from his wrist. A mask covered the upper half of the Ninja's face, but Wong could see his mouth twist in a sneer. The sword came up, high above his head.

Shepard Wong closed his eyes. He never saw the sword descend. And after a split-second of searing pain in his neck, he didn't feel anything at all.

The sword rose and fell for long seconds, the light hitting and fracturing on its polished blade, the blade that was becoming more and more reddened. There were no sounds except the breathing of the man in black, the rustle of his ebony clothing, and the dull thwacking sound that the sword made as it chopped down.

After a minute or two, the figure in black left the kitchen. He crossed the living room with long, powerful strides and took hold of the star that was stuck in the desk. With what seemed like effortless ease, he wrenched it free, and the weapon disappeared somewhere in the folds of his loose tunic. Then he turned toward the bedroom and moved back into the shadows, blending perfectly with them so that the only sign of his leave-taking was the gentle movement of the curtains. They swung aside, then swung back, almost as if they were being moved by the warm night breezes than the reddened hand of a killer.

And then the window was pulled down, quicker this time now that there was no one to hear. The rope twitched as it was climbed, then it too disappeared into the night.

Death had come and gone in the darkness.

Shepard Wong would never get that egg salad sandwich, and he would never finish the letter he had started, and most importantly, he would never meet a big redheaded Irishman named Mike Shayne.

## II

WHEN THE TELEPHONE RANG, Mike Shayne was in the shower, alternating hot and cold water, letting the hard stream pound his rangy, powerful body and send tingles of exhilaration along his nerves. It was a good way to wake up, although it took someone with a strong constitution to stand it.

But then the phone rang and interrupted the shower and Shayne's good mood. He cut the water off hurriedly and grabbed for a towel, a scowl drawing his bushy red brows down. There were times when he

had been known to let a phone ring, but as a rule he answered all his calls. There was no way of knowing whether the caller was a wealthy potential client without answering it.

Shayne wrapped the towel around his middle and padded, dripping, into the living room of his apartment. The phone was on a table next to his favorite armchair. He scooped up the receiver and growled, "Yeah?" into it.

"Morning, shamus," a full-throated voice growled right back at him. Shayne recognized it as belonging to Will Gentry, the chief of Miami's efficient police department and one of Shayne's best friends. Gentry didn't sound too sincere when he said, "Hope I didn't get you out of bed."

"No," Shayne replied, "just out of the shower. What is it, Will?" A glance at a clock on the wall told him that it was a little after eight in the morning.

"There's been a murder, Mike, and I think you might be interested. Can you come right over here?"

"Where are you?"

Gentry gave him an address on Sixteenth Street. "It's the murdered man's apartment. I'm here now with the Homicide crew."

Shayne looked down at a small puddle forming at his feet. There were plenty of questions in his mind, but right now he was more interested in getting dried off. He said, "Okay, Will, I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Hanging up, Shayne headed for his bedroom, where he dried off and dressed quickly. He stopped in the kitchen on his way out long enough for a cup of coffee with a dollop of cognac in it, and as he drank it, he tried to think of anyone he knew who lived on Sixteenth Street. Coming up with a blank, he decided he'd just have to wait and see what Will Gentry had for him.

TRUE TO HIS WORD, SHAYNE PULLED UP IN FRONT of the apartment house on Sixteenth a quarter of an hour after hanging up on Gentry. He parked his Buick behind a Miami police car with flashing lights on its roof and strode quickly through the entrance of the building.

A uniformed cop stopped him just inside the door, then recognized him and said, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Shayne. The Chief said for you to go right up. It's Apartment 407."

"Thanks, Ernie," Shayne nodded, then summoned the elevator by punching the button with a blunt finger. His gray eyes scanned the lobby of the building. There were a lot of cops around, not to mention

the ever-present crowd of curious bystanders.

Shayne rode the elevator up to the fourth floor and found more cops, including two who were leaning against the wall of the corridor with white faces and hands clutching their stomachs. Both men looked to be seasoned veterans. Shayne frowned. If whatever was in the apartment had made them look like that, it must really be gruesome.

Shayne pushed through the door marked 407 and spotted Will Gentry's beefy figure standing with a knot of other men on the other side of the room. They were gathered around a door leading into another room, probably the kitchen, and Shayne headed in that direction.

He said, "Here I am, Will. Now, how about telling me what's going on?"

Gentry turned, shifted the soggy butt of an unlit cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and said, "Hello, Mike. We've got a bad one here."

"I thought as much. Anybody I know?"

"If he was, you wouldn't recognize him now." Gentry stood aside and motioned into the kitchen.

Shayne looked past the burly police chief, and his mouth tightened into a grim line. His lantern-jawed face got hard.

Death was no stranger to Mike Shayne. He had seen it in almost every form and fashion during his years as a detective.

But this was different. This wasn't just death.

This was carnage.

"His name was Shepard Wong," Gentry said quietly. "Worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant called the Crimson Pagoda."

Shayne recognized one of the men standing there as a member of a Medical Examiner's staff and asked him, "What did this?"

"Some sort of sharp instrument," the man said. "That much is painfully obvious. Judging from the length and depth of the cuts, it had to be fairly large, something like a machete or a sword. My guess is that the blow across the throat was the fatal one, though a lot of the others could have caused death, too. I think that he was killed first, then the other wounds were administered."

"Somebody hacked him up after he was dead?" Shayne said.

"That's putting it pretty plainly."

"Did you know him, Mike?" Gentry asked.

Shayne shook his head. "I don't think I ever saw him before. And I don't remember ever eating at this Crimson Pagoda."

The meat wagon crew arrived then, and Shayne was more than happy to step back with Gentry and the other policemen and let the

men with the body bags go about their job.

Shayne lit a cigarette and leaned a hip against a writing desk in the corner. "So what's the connection with me, Will?" he asked. "This looks like the work of a psycho, a slasher-type, maybe."

"That's what we thought at first," Gentry grunted. "Then a sharp-eyed kid from Homicide spotted a lump under the carpet over there." Gentry pointed at a spot near the wall where the carpet had been pulled back a few inches. "He looked to see what was causing it and found this."

Shayne took the piece of paper from Gentry as the chief took it from an evidence envelope. He knew it had already been examined and dusted for fingerprints, so he handled it freely. He scanned the words, and as he read, his frown deepened.

"Looks like Shepard Wong wanted to hire you," Gentry said. "He was afraid somebody was going to try to kill him, that's for sure."

"He had good reason to be," Shayne muttered. He looked up from the unfinished letter and went on, "You want me to look into this?"

"I thought you might want to. We're going to investigate to our fullest effort, of course. A brutal thing like this demands it. But I didn't figure it would hurt anything to have you poking around, too. I know you'll cooperate if you come up with anything." There was extra emphasis on that last sentence.

Shayne grinned. "Now, Will, when did I not cooperate with the proper authorities?"

Gentry was about to frame a caustic retort when the ambulance crew came out of the kitchen carrying what was left of Shepard Wong, and both men fell silent. Despite the fact that murder was their business, it still outraged both of them, especially a grisly killing like this one.

"All right," Shayne said a moment later. "You've got my help on this one, Will, all the way."

"There's not much to go on. Wong doesn't have a record of any kind, and we haven't been able to turn up any relatives around here."

"I guess I'll start at this restaurant where he worked, then. The Crimson Pagoda, right?"

"Right. I've already sent some men over there, but you can cover the ground, too."

Shayne nodded grimly and stalked out of the apartment without another word. As he rode down in the elevator and went out to his car, a phrase from Shepard Wong's desperate letter kept going through his brain.

... see that justice is done ...

That was just what Shayne intended to do.

IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG TO DRIVE BACK across downtown Miami. The Crimson Pagoda was just off Biscayne Boulevard, near the bay. He remembered seeing it, though he had never been there. The hour was still fairly early, but he thought that someone should be there, getting a start on preparations for the lunch hour.

The restaurant was set behind a spacious parking lot and was modeled on the classic Chinese architectural style, with the sloping, tiered roof that rose to a point. A large brass gong sat beside the entrance to the parking lot, and as Shayne drove in, he could see another one behind the front door.

The lot was empty, but Shayne could see that the front door was slightly ajar. The employee parking lot was probably in the rear. Shayne left his Buick near the door and then strode up to it, placing a broad hand on it and pushing.

The door opened into the dim interior of the restaurant. There were no lights on in the main room, but enough light came in from outside to show Shayne the exquisite paintings and tapestries on the wall. There were quite a few tables, with the chairs turned up on them, and a long salad bar took up one wall of the room. A smaller dining room opened up to one side, with a rope across the entrance now. At the back of the main room, another door led to what Shayne supposed was the kitchen. One wall was blank, with no tables near it, and Shayne wondered what its purpose was. It looked like an area where live entertainment would perform, assuming the restaurant had any.

Shayne headed toward the door to the kitchen, but before he could get there, a man and woman came out through it. They stopped momentarily at the sight of him, then came toward him. The man put out his hand.

"I am Léon Ho, the owner of this establishment," he said, shaking Shayne's hand firmly. "May I help you?"

Ho was a small, thin man, with a pleasant, slightly lined face with graying hair cut short. Shayne told him, "My name is Mike Shayne. I suppose the police have been here about what happened to Shepard Wong."

Shayne saw a shudder go through the girl at his mention of Wong's name, and he wondered if he had made a blunder. For all he knew, this girl could have been related to Wong.

"Yes, two policemen came by and told us about it a little while ago," Ho said. "It's terrible, such a horrid thing to happen."

"Shepard was a good man," the girl said. There was a tremor in her voice.

"I have been rude," Ho said. "Mr. Shayne, this is one of our hostesses, Leiko Smith."

The combination of names struck Shayne as strange, but he just nodded to her and said, "Pleased to meet you, Miss Smith."

"The honor is mine, Mr. Shayne," she said, bowing slightly. Shayne looked at her more closely now and saw that even in the shadows, she had a beauty that was breathtaking. Her hair was black, jet black, and it framed a face that was perfectly shaped. Her skin was fair, and her eyes slanted less than Ho's. The Oriental cast was there, but it was tempered by blood from another source. American father, Chinese mother, Shayne surmised.

"Your name seems familiar, Mr. Shayne," Leon Ho was saying. "Might I ask your connection with the present tragic circumstances?"

"I'm working with the police on the investigation into Shepard Wong's murder," Shayne said. "I was wondering if you could tell me something about him."

"Certainly, I will tell you all I know, but I am afraid that is not much. Shall we sit down?"

They took chairs off one of the tables and sat down. Shayne noticed that Leiko Smith kept her eyes on the table and didn't seem to want to look at him now. She seemed shy, and Shayne wondered if she had not been in America long.

"Shepard Wong was a good waiter," Ho said. "He was very efficient, courteous to the customers, and above all, honest. That is very important. A businessman must have honest employees."

This wasn't helping Shayne. He said, "What about his personal life?"

"Oh, I'm afraid I don't know much about that," Ho said. "Ours was strictly a business relationship. You might ask some of his fellow workers."

"Miss Smith?" Shayne looked at her questioningly.

She seemed flustered. "Yes, I knew Shepard fairly well. What do you wish to know?"

"Did he have any enemies?"

"He . . . he never mentioned any."

"Did he seem unusual in any way lately? Did he act like he was frightened?"

"Not that I noticed. We were friends, but there are others that he was closer to."

"Like who?" Shayne asked.



"The people who work in the kitchen, I suppose. They must have known him better than anyone else."

"Could I talk to them?" Shayne asked Ho.

"Of course." Ho was looking intently at Shayne, and now the light of recognition suddenly came into his eyes. "I know you now!" he exclaimed. "You are the famous private detective."

"I'm a PI," Shayne admitted with a grunt.

"You have been sent by fate," Ho said excitedly. "The gods have sent you to find the killer of Shepard Wong!"

"Now wait a minute," Shayne began, but Ho interrupted him.

"I wish to hire you," the little restaurant owner said. "I will pay you whatever you wish, if you will find the foul murderer and see that he is punished. You agree to this?"

"I'm already on the case," Shayne growled. "There's no need for you to —"

"I wish to do it, though," Ho insisted. "I know no better way to honor the memory of Shepard Wong."

Shayne took a deep breath. "All right. But no retainer. I'll have my secretary type up a contract and send it to you, and you'll only owe me if I find the killer. All right?"

"Excellent. Now, you must talk to my kitchen staff. Leiko will accompany you and handle any difficulties you may encounter, with the language and such."

Shayne noticed that he hadn't asked Leiko before volunteering her services as an interpreter. But the lovely young girl just nodded meekly and said, "It would be my honor."

"In fact," Ho went on, "it would probably be a good idea if Leiko assisted you with the rest of your investigation. There is not a large Chinese population here in Miami, Mr. Shayne, but if your searchings take you among them, you will find it easier to seek out information if you have one of their countrymen with you."

Shayne frowned and rasped a thumbnail along his jawline. "I don't know," he said slowly. "I don't want to impose on anybody."

"It would be no imposition," Ho said, still talking for Leiko, but she didn't seem to mind. "It is our duty to help you find his killer."

"All right," Shayne nodded. He would go along with it for now, until he got the girl away from Ho's forceful presence, then see what she thought about it.

They all stood up, and Ho waved a small hand toward the kitchen. "You are my guest here, Mr. Shayne," he said, "and I wish you the best of luck in your endeavor."

"Come with me, please," Leiko said, "and I will take you to Shepard Wong's friends."

Shayne followed her across the room. He couldn't help but notice the appealing shape she exhibited in a tight, simply-cut American dress. Her long dark hair flowed down her back, and despite the Western clothing, she was undeniably Oriental, and undeniably beautiful.

This could be a very interesting case, Shayne thought.

A beautiful Chinese girl for an assistant, a savage murder to solve, the possibility of a good fee from Leon Ho . . . Shayne was starting to be glad that Will Gentry had called him.

### III

THEY FOUND TEN PEOPLE IN THE KITCHEN, two cooks, four dishwashers, and four waiters. All of them were Chinese or Japanese, and all of them spoke English to some extent, some quite good, and others just barely. The two cooks seemed to have the most trouble with the language, and Shayne was glad that Leiko Smith was with him. She got his questions across to them easily, and then interpreted their answers for Shayne.

He asked the kitchen staff the same questions he had asked Leon Ho and Leiko. Did Shepard Wong have any enemies? None that they knew of. Had he been acting strange lately? Not that they had noticed. Did he seem frightened of something? Not as far as they could tell.

The answers were all the same until Shayne reached the second cook, a huge man with a bald head and drooping moustaches. As Shayne looked at him, he was reminded of a Chinese warlord in a movie he had seen once. This fellow looked like he could be Genghis Khan's cousin.

Shayne asked him if he knew Shepard Wong well, and Leiko relayed the question to him. He replied in a spate of Chinese. Leiko turned back to Shayne and said, "He says that he knew Shepard Wong well, that he often visited him."

"What does he know about him?"

Leiko and the cook conversed for a moment, then the girl said to Shayne, "He says that Shepard Wong was his friend, that he tried to teach him English and the American way of life. Feng is from Hong Kong, but wishes to become an American citizen, like Shepard was. Shepard was helping him."

"Does he know if Wong had any enemies?"

Again the conversation in Chinese, then Leiko said, "None that he

knows of, but he has seen several men coming out of Shepard's apartment when he was going to visit him there. Feng says that after these visits, Shepard always seemed nervous."

"Can he describe the men?"

Leiko asked the question, and Feng grunted, the sound coming from deep within his massive chest. Leiko smiled slightly as he answered, then turned to Shayne. "He asks how can he describe them. They were white men, and Feng can never tell one white man from another."

Shayne didn't know whether to laugh or growl. The big cook might be making fun of him, but somehow he doubted it. Feng added one more comment, and Leiko translated it. "He says they did not look like good men, though. He can tell that much."

A hunch was playing around in Shayne's mind. He was sure Feng had seen enough American television to pick up a few words. He looked directly at the cook and said, "Gangsters?"

Feng nodded and smiled happily:

Some of the others in the kitchen were starting to fidget and look nervous. Maybe they had known about Wong's visitors and had been afraid to say anything, Shayne mused. It was a possibility. If that was the case, they could be worried now because they had lied to Shayne.

He wasn't going to give them any trouble over it, though. He had what he had come here to look for — a place to start, the beginnings of a trail. Wong had received some Caucasian visitors who looked to Feng like gangsters. Now all Shayne had to do was find out what kind of connection the underworld had with a waiter in a Chinese restaurant.

Now that should be a nice easy job.

Shayne gave an inward snort at his mental sarcasm and said to Leiko, "I think I'm going to go back to Wong's apartment and see if I can find any trace of these visitors he's supposed to have had. Would you like to come along?"

"Mr. Ho told me to accompany you. I know where Shepard lived, and there are several Chinese families in the neighborhood. Perhaps I can help you if you wish to question them."

"You're sure it won't interfere with your job here?"

"Mr. Ho wishes me to help you."

"Okay," Shayne grinned at her and saw her cast her eyes downward modestly. "Let's go."

They stopped in the main room to tell Ho that they were leaving; and the restaurateur sent them on their way with a bouquet of flowery words, wishing down all sorts of divine help for Shayne on his quest. Shayne shook his hand again while Leiko got her purse, then ushered her out to his car.

WHEN THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY BACK ACROSS MIAMI, Leiko asked without looking at him, "Am I a bother to you, Mr. Shayne? Now that we are away from the Crimson Pagoda, I can speak more freely. I know Mr. Ho means well, but I might just be in your way."

He grinned again. "I don't think so. You were a big help back there, and I never would have gotten that out of Feng if you hadn't been there. As long as the investigation is still in the preliminary stages, I'm more than happy to have you around. Of course, when I get close to the killer, I'll want you to be in a safe place, like back at your job."

Shayne glanced over at her, and she smiled shyly at him. "I am glad," she said. "You seem like a good man, and I would not want to annoy you."

"No chance of that."

After a few minutes of silence, Leiko asked, "Why are you interested in Shepard Wong's death, Mr. Shayne? I know that Mr. Ho has hired you now, but before?"

Shayne didn't see any harm in telling her. "The cops found a note that Wong was writing when he was killed. He was writing to me, and he wanted to hire me to do something. I don't know for sure what it was, but I know he was afraid he'd be killed before he got a chance to talk to me. He asked that if anything happened to him, that I would see justice done. That's what I intend to do."

"But he never hired you."

"He was going to. That counts for something." Shayne's face took on a grim look. "Besides, I saw what the killer did to him. I don't want that kind of beast running around loose."

"Now I know you are a good man, too," Leiko said slowly.

Shayne didn't know what to say to that, so he kept his mouth shut.

A period of silence went by again as Shayne neared Wong's apartment, then Leiko asked, "Do you believe what Feng said about gangsters visiting Shepard?"

"He only said they looked like gangsters. They could have been almost anybody or anything. But it's a theory worth checking out, I think. If somebody in the mob had a grudge against Wong, they wouldn't hesitate to take him out. And they can be pretty gruesome when they want to be."

He parked the Buick in front of the apartment house. The police cars were gone by now, and Shayne knew that the technicians would have done their jobs and left as well. There might be a guard on the door, but more than likely it was just sealed. He could call Will Gentry

from the super's apartment and let him know that they were going back in.

The superintendant was a middle-aged man who chain-smoked and claimed not to know a thing about Shepard Wong or any mysterious visitors. He blew smoke in Shayne's face and said, "Nah, I never kept up with Wong, only to get the rent ever month." He cast his eyes in Leiko's direction and Shayne saw them light up with a lecherous glow.

Shayne moved in front of him, face set in hard lines, and said harshly, "I need to use your phone. Police business."

"Uh, yeah, sure, it's over there." The super rubbed a hand over his stubbled face and tried to look around Shayne at the girl. Shayne leaned toward him and said quietly, "You're making me nervous, friend."

The super looked into Shayne's eyes, swallowed abruptly, and said, "Sorry. You go right ahead and use the phone."

He kept his eyes on the floor or the ceiling the rest of the time.

Will Gentry grumbled about Shayne's request to go back into Wong's apartment, but he went along with it after several acerbic comments. He promised to send a detective right over and told Shayne to wait until the man got there before breaking the seal.

"Sure, Will," Shayne agreed. "Your boys turn up anything yet?"

"Not yet. But we will."

"If I don't beat you to it," Shayne gibed.

Gentry snorted and hung up.

Shayne turned to Leiko and said, "Let's go on up to the apartment. There'll be a cop here in a few minutes to make sure we don't run off with any evidence."

They rode the elevator up to the fourth floor, and they were alone in the little car. Shayne was very aware of Leiko's presence. She was affecting him strongly, more strongly than he had realized at first, and he told himself to keep his mind on the business at hand — finding out who had chopped Shepard Wong up into little pieces.

The elevator doors slid open, and Shayne led the way out into the corridor. There was no one else in sight, but as Shayne strode down the hall toward Apartment 407, there was a sudden prickling on the back of his neck. Something was wrong.

When they got close to the door, he saw what it was.

The door was supposed to be sealed. Instead it was open, standing slightly ajar.

Shayne stopped, putting a hand on Leiko's forearm to stop her. He pointed at the open door and whispered, "No way the cops could al-

ready be here. Somebody's been here before us, and they might still be in there."

He caught a hint of her perfume as he leaned close to her ear, and the scent of it was fascinating. He put any notions it might have given him out of his mind, though; this was no time for them.

She whispered back, "What are you doing to do?"

"I'm going to see who else is interested in Shepard Wong," he said bluntly. "You get back downstairs and wait for that cop."

Releasing her arm, he moved toward the door quickly, moving with a noiseless grace that was uncharacteristic for a man of his size. He paused at the door, sliding his hand under his coat and closing his fingers around the butt of his pistol in its shoulder holster. Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw Leiko still standing there uncertainly in the hall. Shayne wagged his eyebrows at her, trying to get her to leave.

And while he was doing that, a hand came out of the apartment, grabbed his collar, and jerked.

Shayne went stumbling into the apartment, snatching his gun out as he went. He spun around as he regained his balance and saw the four figures surrounding him. The shades in the room were drawn, making it shadowy, but Shayne had no trouble seeing the men leaping at him.

He ducked under a punch and lashed out with the hand holding the gun, feeling it smash into flesh. There was a howl of pain, but Shayne didn't get to enjoy the minor victory. An arm looped around his neck and tightened, and a fist slammed into his stomach. As his breath whooshed out of his lungs, he drove an elbow back at the man who had him pinned and felt it sink into the man's midsection.

Another fist was coming at him. Shayne tried to jerk his head to the side to avoid it, but the grip on his neck was too tight. The blow crashed into the side of his head, setting off rockets in his brain. More punches rained into his torso. There were just too many, coming from too many directions. He couldn't hope to block them all . . .

"Kiii-yaahh!"

The cry was unexpected, and so was the sudden flurry of thuds and cries. Shayne saw a blur of motion in the shadows, saw long black hair whipping around a rapidly-moving body, and then two of the men were flying in opposite directions.

Shayne took advantage of the opportunity, lifting a big foot in a hard kick. It took the third man in the stomach and sent him staggering and gasping. Shayne twisted and brought his other foot down savagely on the instep of the man holding him. That loosened the grip enough for him to slip out of it. He swung around and launched a long, looping punch.

There was nothing there for it to hit. He saw Leiko's lithe form flash by in front of him, her arm flashing down and her fisted hand catching the man in the throat. He folded up with a strangled cry of agony, and Shayne's fist sailed through empty air, throwing him off balance. He went to one knee.

The first two men were back on their feet now, lunging toward them, and Shayne threw up an arm to protect his head from a blackjack that one of them was swinging. The weapon thudded against his arm, and he felt it go numb to the shoulder.

Leiko tried to side-kick the second one; but she had lost the element of surprise. He dodged wildly and swung a punch at her head. It clipped her on the temple, and the blow, combined with her loss of balance from the missed kick, sent her sprawling to the floor.

Shayne tried to get to his feet, but the man with the blackjack swung it again and the big detective had to fall backwards to avoid it.

"Let's get out of here!"

The cry from one of the men sent the other three running after him. Shayne heard their footsteps pounding away down the hall, and he had started to his feet, meaning to pursue them, when a low moan from Leiko stopped him.

He knelt beside her, holding his numbed arm with his other hand, and said urgently, "Miss Smith! Leiko! Are you all right?"

Her eyes had been closed, but she opened them now and looked around in confusion. "Are they gone?" she gasped.

Shayne couldn't hear the running footsteps anymore. "They're gone," he said. "You saved my bacon, Leiko. They had the drop on me, and the odds were a little too high."

She sat up and shook her lovely head slowly. "I — I was trying to help."

"You did," Shayne assured her. "I'm glad you didn't do like I told you and go back downstairs. And we found out something."

She looked up at him. "Something to do with Shepard Wong's death?"

Shayne nodded. "If those bozos were his visitors, then Feng was right. They were gangsters."

"You recognized them?"

Shayne's face and voice were grim. "Yeah. They work for a man named Jerry Killian. And you won't find a more vicious, ruthless bastard in Miami."

## IV

IT WAS OBVIOUS FROM LOOKING AROUND that Killian's men had been ransacking the place. The desk drawers were lying on the floor, their contents strewn around them, and the cushions of the sofa and chair had been slashed. Shayne wondered what they had been looking for, and if their search had been successful.

If there was anything there to find, they must have found it and taken it with them, he concluded a few minutes later after making a search of his own. Leiko helped, and they covered the apartment rapidly. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it.

As they came back into the living room from the bedroom, a voice spoke from the door into the hall. "I thought you were supposed to wait until I got here, Shayne. Looks like you had a field day in here."

Shayne recognized the tall, placid figure as Lee Darrell, one of Will Gentry's Homicide detectives. Shayne knew him slightly, and knew that his unassuming exterior hid a good officer. He said, "We didn't do this, Darrell. Somebody beat us to it."

"Did you see who it was?"

Shayne shook his head. "They were gone when we got here," he lied. His hand was on Leiko's arm, and he gently increased the pressure of his fingers.

"Gentry's not going to like this," Darrell said.

"Neither do I. But there's not much we can do about it."

Darrell glanced around the apartment. "I suppose you went ahead and had your look around, since the door was already open and all."

"I didn't see any point in waiting."

"Find anything?"

"There's nothing to find." That much, at least, was the truth.

Darrell waved a hand at Leiko. "Who's this?"

Shayne grinned. "Detective Lee Darrell, This is Miss Leiko Smith."

Darrell said hello a little awkwardly, and his face showed that he was slightly flustered. Leiko was a pretty girl, there was no denying that, and Darrell was well aware of it.

Shayne said, "We've got to get going. Tell Will we didn't find anything, but thank him anyway for me."

"Will do."

When they were riding down alone again in the elevator, Leiko asked, "Why did you not tell him about this Killian?"

"I want to keep it to myself, at least for a little while, until I get his connection checked out. The cops will get everything I turn up . . . eventually."



Shayne opened the door of the Buick for her when they reached the street, and he felt her brush against him as she got into the car. The contact sent tingles of arousal along his nerves. Again, he caught a faint whiff of her perfume.

"What will you do now?" Leiko asked as Shayne slid behind the wheel.

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly noon. "I think I'll have some lunch. I ran off without breakfast this morning, and it's catching up to me. Can you recommend a good restaurant?"

She laughed suddenly, and it was like the clear, cool bubbling of a stream in the high country. "You are teasing me," she said. "But I do know a good restaurant. It's called the Crimson Pagoda."

Shayne smiled back at her and pointed the car across town.

LEON HO WAS HONORED THAT THE GREAT DETECTIVE wished to eat at his humble restaurant, and he told Shayne as much several times. The Crimson Pagoda was fairly busy, but Shayne was ushered to a special table by Leiko. Ho clapped his hands, and waiters descended on the table like locusts. Attention like that was something that Shayne had never cared for, but this time he had to give up, sit back, and let them do as they pleased.

A seemingly endless procession of food came to his table, and by the time he pushed back his chair an hour later, he felt as stuffed as he had in a long time. At this rate, he was going to disprove the old adage about being hungry again an hour after eating Chinese food. He didn't think he would be hungry again for days.

When the meal was over, Ho and Leiko joined him at the table, and Ho asked, "Have you found out anything yet, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne quickly filled him in on the morning's events, then said, "Miss Smith here is quite a handful in a fight."

Ho beamed with pleasure. "She was always one of my best pupils."

"You taught her how to fight like that?"

"Yes. Before I opened this restaurant, I was an instructor in the martial arts. I taught Leiko."

"You taught me very well," Leiko said gently, her hand patting the older man's, much like a daughter touching her father.

"Now what are your plans?" Ho asked Shayne. "How will you proceed with catching Shepard Wong's killer?"

"The first thing I want to do is talk to your staff again," Shayne said. "Will the two of you go back to the kitchen with me?"

"Of course."

They went back to the kitchen, and the staff almost snapped to attention when Ho stepped through the door. He waved them back to their normal positions, then said in English, "Mr. Shayne would like to talk to you again." He went on in Chinese, and Shayne assumed he was repeating what he had just said, for the benefit of those who didn't speak English well. Then he turned to Shayne and said, "Ask whatever questions you like, Mr. Shayne."

"Thanks." Shayne addressed the staff. "Before, I was asking you about Shepard Wong. You may have been afraid to talk to me. I assure you, you have no reason to be. What I want to know now is, was Wong a gambler?"

"Gambling is very common among the Chinese, Mr. Shayne," Ho put in. "We all take our turns at the games of chance sometimes."

"I'm not talking about minor stuff," Shayne said. "I'm talking about serious, heavy gambling."

"He went to the track a lot," one of the waiters suddenly said. "I don't know how much he gambled, I didn't know him that well, but he was always talking about the horses and how one of them was going to make him a rich man someday."

"Did he ever talk about losing?"

"He came in very depressed some days, particularly after his day off, and he would be cursing the horses then, instead of singing their praises. That sounds like he had lost."

"It sure as hell does," Shayne says, "and it fits, too. Thank you for coming clean with me."

"I hope it will be a help," the waiter said. "Wong and I were not friends, but I heard what happened to him." A shudder ran through the man.

Shayne went with Leiko and Ho back out into the main room, a thoughtful expression on his rugged face. Ho said, "What was the purpose of your questions, Mr. Shayne? You have figured something out?"

"I think so." Shayne tipped a cigarette into his mouth and lit it. "Jerry Killian is part of the illegal gambling set-up in Miami. He's a high-level bookie, actually, although he also has some tie-ins with the narcotics and prostitution arms of the mob. Shepard Wong sounds like a classic gambling addict to me, and if he was losing heavily at the track, it's possible he owed Killian a lot of money. If he couldn't pay up, well . . ."

Leiko paled. "You mean that someone would kill another person over such a thing as money?"

"They sure would," Shayne grunted. "It happens all the time."

Killian could have decided to make an object lesson out of Wong, to discourage slow payment on the part of his other customers."

Ho shook his head. "This is bad business. I hope you can do something about it, Mr. Shayne."

"I intend to," Shayne said. "I'm going to see Killian."

Shayne tried to pay for his meal, only to have his money waved away by Leon Ho. Shrugging, he said his goodbyes to Ho and Leiko, went out to his Buick, and headed away from the Crimson Pagoda.

AS HE DROVE, HE WENT OVER HIS THEORY AGAIN. It all fit. Killian had a reputation in the Miami area underworld for brutality, and not for a minute would Shayne put the carnage in Wong's apartment past him. And Killian had probably sent his men there later to search for anything that would tie the waiter in with him.

Shayne parked in front of a highrise hotel in downtown Miami and went inside. He knew that Killian lived in a suite on the tenth floor, a fact that was galling to Will Gentry and the Miami police, because they had never been able to prove anything on him, despite the widespread knowledge of his mob activities.

An elevator operator in a fancy uniform took Shayne to the tenth floor. The big detective strode quickly down the wide hall, his steps all but soundless on the thick carpet. He stopped in front of a heavy mahogany door and rapped on it sharply, ignoring the gilt bell push set in a carved panel.

Shayne stepped to the side, out of view of the peephole set in the middle of the door, and waited. A long moment passed, and he knew that whoever was inside would be trying to see who was outside. Shayne slid his hand inside his coat and loosened his gun in its holster.

Several long minutes went by as Shayne waited patiently. Then the door opened just a crack, and a harsh voice said, "Hell, there ain't nobody out —"

Shayne didn't let him finish.

He hit the door with a brawny shoulder, slamming it open and ramming it into the man inside. Shayne was right behind it, springing into the room and snapping his knobby fist into the man's face. He had his gun out now, and as the man staggered back holding his suddenly bloody nose, Shayne spun around to cover the room.

The other three men in the room were frozen in a startled tableau. Shayne lined his gun on the one sitting down in a fancy armchair.

"You need to improve your security, Killian," he grated. "If I was one of your gangland enemies, you'd be dead by now."

Killian lifted the glass he was holding to his lips and sipped the

amber liquid in it. "I don't have any gangland enemies, Shayne," he said smoothly. "Don't you know all those stories are lies?"

Killian was a well-dressed man in his early sixties, with a broad, lined face and a carefully groomed shock of white hair. He looked more like a judge than a bookie, but Shayne had heard plenty of stories about his illegal dealings.

"Listen," Shayne said in a flat voice, "you can cut the crap. I know all about you, Killian, except why you killed Shepard Wong."

Killian frowned. "Wong? I don't know anyone named Shepard Wong."

Shayne glanced at the other three men in the room, to see if the name had any effect on them. It should have, because he had recognized them as three of the four men he had encountered in Wong's apartment. They were all wearing poker faces, though, even the one with the bloody nose.

"What's this all about, Shayne?" Killian asked snappishly. "You and I have never had any run-ins before."

"Wong was a waiter at the Crimson Pagoda," Shayne said. "You must know that, because these flunkys of yours were searching his apartment earlier today. Probably looking for evidence of the money Wong owed you, so that the cops wouldn't get the connection."

Killian waved a hand negligently. "This is ridiculous. I deny all of these absurd accusations, and I want you to leave my suite right now, Shayne. If you do, I won't press charges against you for forcing your way in here and assaulting my friend."

Shayne backed toward the door. "All right, Killian. You've got more backbone than I thought. But I'm warning you. I'm on this case now, and I won't stop digging until I find what I need to hang you for the Wong killing. Remember."

He was at the door now, and he slipped through it, closing it behind him. He heard a sudden explosion of curses inside the suite, and a loud voice said distinctly, "Can't we go after him, boss? I think the bastard broke my nose!"

Killian said something sharply, though Shayne couldn't make out the words. He holstered his gun, in case he ran into one of the hotel's guests in the hall, and then hurried toward the elevators. A grin was creasing his lean face.

He had never expected Killian to break down under the accusations. The man was too experienced for that. But he had served notice of his intentions, and that had been his purpose in this visit.

There had been nothing in the way of evidence in Wong's apartment. That meant that if Shayne wanted to prove Killian was re-

sponsible for the waiter's death, he would have to use himself as bait. If Killian was guilty, he would have to be gunning for Shayne now, and as long as Shayne could keep the pressure on, there was a possibility that Killian would slip up. It was a stratagem that Shayne used before with good results, although his friends didn't like it because of its one flaw —

It was a damn good way to get killed.

## V

WHEN SHAYNE WALKED INTO HIS FLAGLER STREET OFFICE a little later, whistling tunelessly, Lucy Hamilton looked up from her desk and said, "Hello, Michael. Would you like to tell me about it?"

"Tell you about what, Angel?"

"The case you're on, the one you got called in on early this morning."

Shayne grinned at his lovely brown-haired secretary. "Did somebody tell you about it already, or are you just guessing?"

"I'm making a trained deduction."

"You've been hanging around detectives too much. But you're right. Will Gentry called me this morning before breakfast. He had a murder he thought I'd be interested in."

Lucy made a slight face. "I thought it must be something like that. Don't you get tired of murder, Michael?"

Shayne shrugged. "Killers don't ask my permission. Anyway, here's the story . . ."

He told her about the case quickly, knowing that her keen mind would have no trouble filling in any gaps that he might leave. One of those gaps was a description of Leiko Smith, though he did mention the help she had given him. Lucy's only questions were about the different ramifications of the case, for which Shayne was grateful.

His understanding with Lucy was a good one, for both of them. They cared for each other deeply, and it would have been foolish not to admit it, but Shayne was still a healthy male who had always had an appreciation for the glorious mystery called Woman. And Leiko Smith was indeed glorious.

"Did anything else happen this morning?" Shayne asked. "I've been so busy with this case that I didn't even have time to check in with you."

Lucy shook her head. "Nothing major. The paperwork, of course, goes on as usual. I've typed up some reports for you to read over and sign."

Shayne had been leaning a hip on the corner of Lucy's desk. Now he got up, tossed his hat onto the rack, and said, "I guess I'd better get at them, then."

He went into the inner office, glanced at the stack of papers on his old, scarred desk, and sighed. Lucy was right. Paperwork always goes on as usual, and there was a lot of it in this profession. There was sometimes excitement and danger to make up for it, but it was the smaller, bread-and-butter jobs that paid the bills.

Shayne spent the rest of the afternoon going over the reports that Lucy had typed up on some minor cases. He kept part of his attention fixed on the outer office, in case anyone should come in — like Killian and his boys. Shayne didn't think it likely that the mobster would move against him in his own office, however. An ambush at his apartment or on the road somewhere would be more Killian's style. Something a little harder to trace back to him.

Shayne had told Lucy about what he was doing and how he was trying to flush Killian out, and although her lips had tightened, she had stopped short of chiding him. She had learned long before that he was more than willing to play fast and loose with his life while he was working on a case.

TIME PASSED SLOWLY, AND SHAYNE WAS READY TO LEAVE when five o'clock finally rolled around. He thought briefly about asking Lucy to have dinner with him, then decided against it. He wasn't going to expose her to the very trouble he had been inviting with his visit to Killian earlier.

He opted instead for a solitary meal at the Beef House, but his lack of companionship didn't stop him from enjoying the fine steak and several sidecars of Martell.

All things considered, Shayne felt pretty good as he rode the elevator up to the second floor of his apartment hotel and then strode down the hall, reaching for his keys. His was the corner apartment, and before keying the door, he paused to look out the window at the end of the hall.

The Miami River was across the street, and in the dim light of dusk, he could see it flowing into Biscayne Bay several blocks away. Palm trees lined the street below, and there was a small park across the way.

Miami was still a good town, despite its troubles in recent years, and Shayne was never more appreciative of its charms than when he was working on a dangerous case. The threat of death made life that much sweeter, including this city that he had adopted as his own after a knockabout early life. He felt alive, his senses tingling, and more than

ready for anything that Killian might send after him.

He unlocked his door and swung it open, his right hand hovering near the butt of his pistol. Nothing happened, so he stepped inside and flicked the lights on. The apartment seemed to be empty. Shayne shut the door behind him and walked into the living room.

A few more seconds told him that it was indeed empty. He hung his hat on the rack inside the door, took his coat and tie off and put them in the bedroom, then poured a drink and carried it over to the armchair. He had picked up the *Daily News* at the stand down the street, and now he opened it up to quickly scan the headlines. He paused occasionally to sip the cognac or to read a story in its entirety if it interested him. Tim Rourke had a story under his byline about the increasing number of arrests for prostitution that the police were making.

The big story on the front page was Wong's murder, though, and Shayne saw that the writer had played it up big, emphasizing the sensational aspects of the case and using the kind of purple prose that the editors at the *News* usually blue-penciled ruthlessly. Shayne frowned at the mention of his own name and the reference to him as "Miami's answer to Sam Spade," and checked the byline on the story. It was by someone named Jack Gilbert, but the name rang no bells with Shayne.

When he glanced up from the paper later, he saw that night had fully fallen now, and he could see the lights of the city sparkling outside his window. He folded the paper, stood up and stretched, and reflected that maybe nothing was going to happen this night. It was always possible that he had been wrong about Killian, but he didn't think so. The man certainly had *some* connection with Shepard Wong.

Shayne tossed the paper onto a table and headed for his bedroom. As he stepped through the open door and snapped the light switch up, something caught his eye . . . something wrong.

There was something outside the window, something dangling there. Shayne took a step toward it.

He frowned. It was a rope. Why would there be a rope outside of his window?

Unless there was somebody climbing it . . .

He was still wearing his shoulder rig, and his hand flew toward the gun in it as the glass suddenly shattered. Shards of it scattered everywhere, and Shayne threw a hand up to protect his eyes. He caught a glimpse of motion at the window, a dark shape that moved like a well-oiled shadow, and then there was a flicker of something shiny and deadly hurtling in his direction!

INSTINCT SAVED SHAYNE'S LIFE. Nerves trained by years of danger took over and moved his hand faster than his consciousness could have ever commanded. Something clanged off the barrel of his gun as he drew it, and he saw the shiny object go sailing off to the side. It hit the wall, rebounded, and fell to the floor.

A star, with all of its points extremely sharp and extremely deadly.

Shayne had seen something like it before, but there was no time to think about where. The figure in black was leaping at him with a high-pitched, keening cry. A bare foot flashed out of nowhere and thudded against his shoulder.

Shayne felt pain shoot down his arm as he staggered backwards. That was the arm that had been blackjacked earlier, and it had still been sore. Now, it was on fire with agony.

He triggered a shot, but the attacker was no longer there. Instead, he was behind Shayne now, almost as if by magic, and a loosely-balled hand slashed at the back of his neck. Shayne almost went to his knees from the blow, keeping his balance with the greatest of difficulty.

The next few seconds were a nightmare. The man in black was there, then he wasn't. Shayne was no match for his speed as he circled, darting in to strike fierce blows with hand and foot. Shayne felt his strength sapping away, drained by the beating he was enduring.

He saw a kick coming at his chest, and Shayne did the only thing he had left to do.

He fell down.

The kick went over his head, and for the first time, Shayne had a break. The man in black was off-balance now, and Shayne rolled into his legs as the man tried to recover. He fell next to Shayne on the floor, and the big redhead lashed out at his head with the gun.

The man jerked his head to the side, though, and the blow missed. Shayne's fist was serving as a backup, however, and it slammed directly into the man's face. Shayne rolled away as fast as he could and surged to his feet.

As fast as he was, the other man was faster. He was on his feet a split-second before Shayne, leaping high at him. Shayne tilted the barrel of his pistol up and squeezed the trigger.

This time the bullet found its mark. The man in black grabbed at his leg and went spinning out of control to the floor. Shayne covered him, his finger white on the trigger.

For the first time, Shayne got a chance to take a good look at the man. In all his years in the business, Shayne had never seen anything like him.

He wore loose, flowing tunic and pants, made out of what looked like



black silk. A mask of the same material covered his head except for the nose and mouth. There was a red sash around his waist. His forearms, hands, and feet were bare. Shayne could see a small patch of blood where the bullet had taken him just below the left knee.

"Just take it easy," Shayne said raggedly, trying to get his breath back. "Who the hell are you?"

"I am your death, fool," the man said quietly. His voice was low but powerful, and Shayne didn't recognize it. "I am the Ninja, come to claim you. You must be destroyed."

"Did Killian send you?" If this was a contract killer, he was certainly unlike any Shayne had ever seen before.

"Killian is a dog and a fool, and he will die, too," the man hissed. He looked down at the wound on his leg, sneered, and said, "The bite of such a gnat is beneath me. I ignore it."

He leaped to his feet.

Shayne was beginning to wonder what the devil he had gotten into.

"Your puny weapon does not frighten me, dog," the Ninja said arrogantly. "Does the flea frighten the tiger?"

Shayne snorted. "Yeah, and Confucious says, you make another move and I'll blow your goddamn brains out."

The man's hands moved faster than Shayne's eyes could follow. They flashed to his neck and then came back down holding a short, curved sword that must have been hung on his back. Shayne suddenly knew instinctively that he was facing Shepard Wong's killer.

The man didn't attack, though, just stood there brandishing the sword and glaring at Shayne. Shayne kept the gun trained on him and said, "Why did you kill Wong?"

"Wong was a traitor, a treacherous cur. He was going to betray the Black Lotus. It was my holy duty to kill him."

"What's a Black Lotus?"

The Ninja grinned savagely. "You will never know, unless the spirits of your ancestors tell you. Heeee-yaahh!"

Shayne fired, but the Ninja was still faster than his slugs, wounded leg and all. Shayne saw the wicked blade flashing toward his face, and he threw himself to the side desperately. Panic welled up within him, and as he fought it down, he realized how Shepard Wong must have felt when he was faced with this murderous, fanatical apparition.

Shayne rolled away from a downward slash of the sword that cut a long gash in his carpet. It had missed by only inches, and as tired and beat-up as he was, Shayne knew that it was only a matter of time until one of the killing strokes found him.

The Ninja was swinging the sword again when Shayne's fingers

closed around the leg of a chair. He threw it in front of him and felt the violent shiver as the blade smacked into the seat of the chair. Shayne jerked the chair back, while the sword was still lodged in it. The Ninja wasn't expecting the move, and he suddenly found himself disarmed.

Shayne tossed the chair and sword to one side of the room and tried to cover the Ninja with his pistol again. His heart was pounding frantically, and his lungs felt like they were going to burst out of his chest. So far, it had taken his maximum effort just to stay alive.

The Ninja paused, looked at Shayne for a moment, then said, "You are almost a worthy apponent, even if you are a fool. But I must kill you, regardless, to satisfy my honor."

Shayne gasped for some air and then said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I failed to realize that Wong had written a letter to you. Failure is not acceptable to a Ninja. Your death will set things right."

Something about that should have meant something to Shayne, but he was too groggy to grasp it. He was about to tell the Ninja to stay still, when the man in black suddenly moved again.

The broken window was behind Shayne, and the kick the Ninja launched at him should have knocked him right through it. But Shayne used his last reserves of strength to duck, grab at the black silk garb, and throw the Ninja past him.

The Ninja hit the window, slapped at the sides of it to stop his momentum, and dropped lithely back to the floor. Shayne gave a mental curse. That was it. He was all done in, and as soon as the Ninja cared to move against him, the fight would be all over.

Through a haze of exhaustion, Shayne saw the Ninja smile slightly in triumph. He raised his hands for the killing blow.

And saw the blood spurting from the severed arteries of his wrists.

The smile dropped off his face, and he swayed against the window. The part of his face that was visible under the mask paled, and Shayne took the only chance he still had.

Gathering some strength from somewhere, Shayne lowered his head and bulled into the man in black, knocking him backwards. The Ninja hit the window frame again, knocking out more of the shattered glass that had slit his wrists. He couldn't stop himself this time, and as Shayne slumped to the floor, completely drained, he saw the Ninja disappear through the window with a cry of surprise.

Shayne sat on the floor for long seconds, listening to the sounds of sirens coming closer. Someone must have reported the shots and the battle. He slowly got to his feet, went to the window, and looked out.

The Ninja was sprawled on the sidewalk below, head twisted at a grotesque angle.

Shayne moved as quickly as he could in his condition, hurrying to the elevator and riding down to the lobby. The night desk clerk was all but cowering behind the desk, but otherwise the place was deserted. Evidently everyone was staying inside until World War III was over.

Shayne limped through the lobby, still clutching his pistol, and pushed out through the doors. The Ninja was still on the sidewalk several yards away, lying in a patch of shadows. Shayne could barely see him. He knelt over the man in black and was shocked when he heard a wheezing breath. The Ninja was still alive.

Alive and talking. In a hoarse voice, he said, "Another will come for you, dog . . . Another will bring . . . you death! You will be destroyed . . . by the blossoms . . . of the Black Lotus . . ."

That was all he said. And all that he would ever say.

Shayne stood up and started back to the hotel to wait for the police to arrive. He would have quite a story to tell them. Oriental assassins in the middle of Miami! It was a good thing he had the body of the Ninja to show them, otherwise they might never believe him —

He glanced back over his shoulder and stopped in his tracks. Something was different in the shadows. Shayne's breath caught in his throat, and he hurried back.

The body of the Ninja was gone, vanished.

Like a puff of black smoke.

## VI

THAT NIGHT WAS A RESTLESS ONE FOR MIKE SHAYNE. The fight had taken a lot out of him, and trying to explain to the cops what had happened wasn't easy, either. Shayne left out most of the story, making the Ninja out to be simply an unknown assailant who had attacked him in his apartment. He also left out any mention of the rope that had been used as a means of access to his bedroom. His story was that the attacker had made his escape out the window, and he said nothing about the man in black dying and then disappearing.

After the police had left, Shayne headed for the roof of the building. He wanted a good look at that rope, even though the chances were slim that it would tell him anything.

He was right about the rope not telling him anything.

It was no longer there.

Shayne cursed, glared at the night, and tugged sharply at his left earlobe. First the Ninja had vanished, and now his rope was gone.

Shayne suddenly remembered the star-like weapon that he had barely escaped from. He hurried back down to his apartment.

The star was gone, too, and by this time, Shayne was no longer surprised. The broken window, the blood stains on the carpet, and the bruises on his body were the only signs that the Ninja had been there, or even existed.

A long soak in a very hot tub and a healthy dose of Martell soothed away some of the pains, and Shayne went to bed determined to get some sleep.

Along towards morning, he accomplished that goal.

The sun shining in his eyes woke him a couple of hours later, and he dragged himself out of bed. As he stood under the shower, he remembered the phone call from Will Gentry that had started the whole thing twenty-four hours earlier.

By the time he arrived at the Crimson Pagoda a little later, he was at least functioning efficiently again, though he was a long way from rested and refreshed.

The front door was again open slightly, no doubt to help the place air out, and Leon Ho spotted Shayne as soon as the big detective came into the place. He came hurrying toward Shayne and said, "Greetings! You have concluded the case successfully, yes?"

"No," Shayne said flatly. "I'm still working on it. But there have been some new developments. Can you tell me what a Ninja is?"

Ho frowned. "A Ninja is a kind of warrior-magician, famed for his fighting and mystical stills. Why do you ask this question?"

"Could a Ninja also be an assassin?"

"I suppose some would see it that way. To an enemy of the Ninja's master, he would definitely be a force to be feared."

"Have you ever heard the phrase *Black Lotus*?" Shayne asked.

Ho's frown deepened. He shook his head. "I am afraid not, Mr. Shayne. Please, tell me what has happened?"

Shayne lit a cigarette, looking around him at the Chinese decor. "I was attacked in my apartment last night by something out of an old Kung Fu movie. He called himself the Ninja, and he admitted killing Shepard Wong."

Ho caught his breath and asked, "You apprehended this man?"

Shayne shook his head. "He wound up dead, though it was really no fault of mine. I was damn lucky he didn't kill me. That's what he came there to do. But then a funny thing happened."

He paused, and Ho asked eagerly, "What?"

"The body disappeared."

Ho's eyes widened. "Incredible," he breathed. "Why are you

telling me this, Mr. Shayne?"

"I thought you might know something about it?"

A hard cast came over Ho's features. "You believe I am some sort of criminal?"

Shayne had considered that possibility, since Wong's admitted killer had been Oriental, but he also knew that crime knows no racial distinction. The Ninja could have been working for anyone with enough money and he still considered Jerry Killian a prime suspect.

"I never said I thought you were a criminal," Shayne declared. "But you know the Oriental community around here better than I do. I thought you might have heard some rumors, especially about this Black Lotus thing. I don't know if it's a person, or a group."

Ho nodded. "I understand now. Unfortunately, I cannot help you, as I have never heard of this Black Lotus. Perhaps, though, Leiko could be of assistance to you again."

Shayne grinned. "I was just going to ask you if I could borrow her from you again today. I need to ask some questions, and I think I'll come closer to getting answers with her along."

"Of course. She is in the kitchen."

**LEIKO LOOKED AS ALLURING AS EVER.** She was wearing a silk dress that was slit far up her thigh, and Shayne felt a fresh surge of desire as he looked at her. She gave him a dazzling smile and said that she would be more than happy to go with him again.

They started with the people Leiko knew in the neighborhood. Most of them seemed glad to talk to her, but when Shayne started asking questions, they clammed up. No one admitted knowing anything about the Black Lotus, but more than once, Shayne saw a glimmer of fear in dark eyes when he asked his questions.

There is no Chinatown in Miami, as there is in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The Oriental population is too few in number and too wide-spread for such a congregation. So it took Shayne and Leiko most of the morning to cover the ground. While he enjoyed Leiko's company, it was a toss-up as to what Shayne was feeling the most — a growing attraction for her, or a growing frustration with his lack of progress in this case.

A nebulous theory was beginning to form in his mind, though. Many of the people they had questioned were afraid of something. That something might be a crime ring that was concentrated in the Oriental community, a crime ring called the Black Lotus. He had no proof of that hunch, but it seemed to fit what the Ninja had said.

As he and Leiko drove down a narrow street, Shayne's right hand

tightened on the steering wheel and his left strayed up to worry at his earlobe. If his theory was right, Wong could have been tied in with the crime ring some way and could have been about to sell them out. That would have led to his death, undoubtedly.

If that was right, though, then what was Killian's connection? That was a question that Shayne didn't have an answer for.

His mind was travelling along that track when he suddenly spotted an elderly man shuffling along the sidewalk. They were in a rather run-down area now, and when Shayne saw the man's lined, yellow face, he realized that they hadn't questioned any of the older Orientals. In fact, he couldn't remember even seeing any during the morning. That was unusual, he thought, especially considering the reverence with which the Oriental regarded his elders.

Shayne pulled the Buick over to the curb, and Leiko asked, "Why are we stopping, Mr. Shayne?"

"I think it's time you made that Mike," Shayne said. "And I want to talk to that old gentleman over there."

Leiko looked surprised. "He has many years. He may not be able to help you. He may not even speak English."

"That's why I brought you along," Shayne grinned as he studied her exquisite profile. "At least that's one of the reasons."

Leiko was beginning to get Shayne's drift, and she blushed slightly as they got out of the car. Shayne lifted a hand in greeting as he said to the old man, "Hello, sir. Do you mind if we talk to you for a moment? Do you speak English?"

The man drew himself up to his full height of a little over five feet and gazed up at Shayne. He wore khaki pants and shirt, thick glasses covered his eyes, and his hair was white. He said solemnly, "Of course I speak English. It is the language of this land, is it not?"

Shayne nodded and told himself not to patronize this dignified little man. "That's right," he said. "My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a detective, and I'm working on a case. I wonder if you would mind answering a few questions?"

"Of course." The man looked curiously at Leiko for a second, but he didn't speak to her. Shayne had noticed that attitude in some of the other men he had spoken to, as if a woman was almost beneath their notice, even a beautiful one like Leiko.

"Can you tell me anything about the Black Lotus?" Shayne asked.

"The *Black Lotus*?" the old man croaked.

The sudden change in him was stunning. The dignified look fell off his face, and Shayne saw fear there, as he had seen it in others this

day. The old man's hands began to tremble. He swallowed and licked his lips.

"The Black Lotus," the man repeated in a hoarse whisper. "How does a white man know of this thing?" He shot an accusing glance at Leiko, who looked bewildered.

Shayne felt a sudden urgency. The old man was the first who would admit that the Black Lotus existed. "Can you tell me about it?" he asked again.

The old man was still shaking. His dark eyes seemed far away now. "Evil," he said excitedly. "All is smoke and death — Evil — The Black Lotus —"

Leiko caught at Shayne's arm and with a gesture, told him to go back to the car. He went, grudgingly, and he heard Leiko saying to the agitated old man, "Peace, grandfather, peace. Do not worry. All will be well. Do not think on evil things."

They were standing in front of a hotel and rooming house that had seen better days. The old man turned away from Leiko and started shakily toward the entrance of it. Leiko let him go.

"Why did you do that?" Shayne asked tightly when she came over to where he was leaning on the Buick. "He knew something."

A look of sadness was etched on Leiko's face. "He knew the fumes of the pipe," she said bitterly. "You could not have known, could not have seen the signs. All you heard, Mike, was the rememberings of a lifetime of sickly-sweet dreams."

"Opium?" Shayne asked.

"It is still a problem, especially among the older ones." The sadness on her face deepened. "I have seen it much, among my elders in my homeland. With the older ones, it is the opium and the hashish, and the young ones have their heroin. Life among such surroundings is not good, especially for a young girl . . ."

Now it was her eyes that were faraway, and Shayne realized that she was talking about herself, which was something she had not done before. He thought he saw why now — The memories were too painful.

"So really all we've done today is run into a dead end," he said.

Leiko came back to the present with a shy smile. "We were able to enjoy each other's company again," she said. "That is good."

"It certainly is," Shayne agreed. "We might as well get back to the Crimson Pagoda. I'll buy you lunch."

"Mike . . ." Leiko said tentatively, "I would be honored to have lunch with you, but please, could we go somewhere else to have it?" She laughed. "You see, I get tired of Chinese food."

"Sure, I can understand that. What would you like?"

Leiko looked hopeful. "Tacos?"

Shayne roared with laughter and said, "Tacos."

AFTER THEIR LUNCH, which Leiko seemed to enjoy immensely, Shayne dropped her off at the Crimson Pagoda. Before she got out of the car, she asked, "What are you going to do now, Mike?"

He rubbed at his jawline and said, "I'm not sure. We seem to have exhausted all our leads. The man who actually killed Wong is dead now, but what we want is the person or persons who gave him his orders. They're the real murderers."

Leiko suddenly leaned over and kissed his gaunt cheek. Her delicate perfume filled his nostrils, and the warm touch of her lips sent a charge of electricity through him. "I wish you luck," she said softly, and then she had slipped out of the car and was walking swiftly toward the entrance of the Crimson Pagoda.

Shayne watched her go with a crooked smile on his face, then squared his shoulders and started the Buick's engine. As he drove back toward his office, he reflected on just how much of a dead end the case had come to.

The bait he had set out for Jerry Killian had no effect, as far as he could see, *unless* Killian had sent the Ninja. That was entirely possible. Maybe Killian was expanding his operations into the Oriental community; he might be behind the Black Lotus. There was no way Shayne would find out by asking questions on the street, though. The Black Lotus seemed to be a forbidden topic of discussion.

Except to an old man whose brain might well be muddled by opium.

Shayne kept thinking about that old man during the next few hours, as he sat in the office with Lucy, finishing up the reports she had typed and turning away a couple of clients whose cases would be better handled by a large agency. He was a strictly one-man operation, which made him perfect for troubleshooting, but not so good for jobs like security checks and surveillance. Which was the way Shayne liked it.

The image of the little grandfather kept intruding into his mind as he worked, and he finally tossed down the report he was reading and stalked into the outer office.

Snagging his hat off the rack, he said to Lucy, "I think I'll try to find that old Chinaman I told you about. He was the only one who didn't close up tighter than a bank vault when I mentioned the Black Lotus."

"I thought you said he might not be a reliable source."

"He may not be, but I don't have a hell of a lot else to go on." Shayne settled his hat on his coarse red hair and went out.

He headed for the area where they had seen the old man earlier,



intending to ask about him in the hotel that the man had entered. But as he turned the Buick onto the block, he saw the very man he was looking for, hurrying down the street.

There seemed to be something furtive about his actions, as he kept glancing over his shoulder while he shambled along. Shayne pulled in to the curb and parked the car. He knew a hunch when it came along, and he knew that he wanted to follow this elder unnoticed.

He let the man get a block and a half ahead before he stepped out onto the sidewalk. There were a few people on the street to furnish a little cover. Shayne strode along the sidewalk, not too rapidly, since he didn't want to catch up to the old man, but he always had his eye on his quarry.

The old man led the procession for several blocks before he turned down an alley next to an old warehouse that looked unused. Shayne made it to the mouth of the alley in time to see the man go through a door that looked like it was barely hanging on its hinges. Shayne gave him a few seconds, then hurried down the alley after him.

If the old man wasn't up to anything, then Shayne might wind up feeling foolish. But this case already had him buffaloed. He would risk another dead end, as long as there was a chance of a new lead.

THE BATTERED DOOR LET HIM INTO THE DARK INTERIOR of the warehouse. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust in the dimness, but when they had, he saw that he was in a huge room, the main room of the warehouse, with an echoing ceiling high overhead. A few grimy windows near the top let in a little light, enough for him to see that there was no sign of the old man, and nowhere for him to have gone.

Shayne frowned. The last thing he needed was another screwy disappearance, like with the Ninja. Then his eyes spotted something in the middle of the floor. As he took a few cautious steps toward it, he saw it was a trap door.

That had to be where the old man had gone, but as Shayne studied it, he saw that it was much too massive for such a small individual to have lifted. There must have been someone on the other side to lift it.

Shayne felt his pulse quicken. He knew it was far-fetched, but it was possible that he had stumbled over the headquarters of the Black Lotus. An unprepossessing place like this warehouse would make a good hideout.

Shayne bent, grasped the edge of the door with his fingers. If this was the gateway to the Black Lotus, there might well be guards on the other side, but he was in no mood to summon the cops. He wouldn't

be able to give them any concrete reason for wanting to search the warehouse's basement, and he wasn't about to tell them about disappearing corpses and old men and something called Black Lotus. Not even the Miami cops would believe *that*.

He gave a heave, and the door came up smoothly. A flight of well-worn steps led down from it, and Shayne saw a dim light at the bottom. He laid the door back on its hinges as carefully and quietly as possible, then slipped his gun out of its holster. No way was he going to stop now.

Keeping to the edge of the steps to minimize squeaks, Shayne descended them quickly. When he reached the bottom, he saw that a short corridor led away from the landing. It was lit by small, dim bulbs that seemed to cast shadows as much as they did light. There was a wooden door at the other end of the corridor, with a small window in it at eye level. Shayne cat-footed toward it.

He slid to one side, took his hat off, and edged one eye past the window. The room inside was even dimmer than the hall, but after a moment, Shayne began to make things out.

It was a long room, its walls lined with shelf-like wooden couches. Another row of couches ran down the center of the room, and Shayne estimated that there was room for forty or fifty people to recline in the uncomfortable-looking berths. He could see several men shuffling around the room, looking dazed, and Shayne thought he saw the reason in the thick haze that hung over the entire room.

It was like something out of Sax Rohmer.

An opium den, right in the middle of Miami!

Shayne saw the old man he had followed, trudging down the aisle beside the row of couches, an opium pipe in his hand. Reaching down with his free hand, Shayne tried the knob of the door. It turned easily. There were no guards in sight, and Shayne knew that the old man might spill everything he knew while he was under the influence of the drug. He swung the door open and stepped inside.

The cloying fumes threatened to overwhelm him at first, and he knew he would have to hold his breath as much as possible. He was already beginning to feel lightheaded as he started toward the old man.

"Dog!" a voice spat behind him.

Shayne whirled in time to see a figure in black materialize out of the smoke, spinning a strange weapon in his hands. The hard wooden cylinders on each end of a short chain whipped toward Shayne, cracking across his wrist and sending the gun flying away.

"No white man is allowed here!" the figure hissed. "And the only

way you will leave is dead!"

It was impossible, but there he was, in the same black silk outfit, the same mask, the same sneer on his face as he promised death.

The Ninja — reborn!

## VII

IT WAS A SCENE UNLIKE ANY Shayne had ever encountered. The dark, menacing figure in front of him, the intoxicating mist that surrounded him, the drugged, shuffling men who paid no attention to the drama in their midst . . .

There was no time to question, no time to ponder how the Ninja could still be alive, because the man in black was suddenly leaping at him, kicking at his head with a sharp cry —

Shayne dodged to one side and felt the kick rip his hat off, but the force of the blow missed him. He was fresher this time, although still sore from the night before, and he swung a hard fist, driving it deep into the belly of the Ninja. The man gasped and looked shocked as he was knocked backwards by the force of the blow.

Shayne was after him in a flash, shooting punches to the head and body. The Ninja seemed stunned, not nearly as competent as the night before.

And then Shayne saw why. As the man in black threw up an arm to ward off a blow, Shayne got a good look at his wrist. There were no wounds, no sign of the previous night's blood-letting. This had to be a different man, dressed in a similar costume.

The guess was confirmed a second later, as another foe slammed into Shayne's back and sent him spinning to the floor. Shayne rolled away and saw that it was another Ninja, with two more behind him. They had to be coming from another entrance into the room.

Surrounded by the shadowy figures, Shayne took the only sensible route. He said, "Hold it! I give up."

One of the figures laughed unpleasantly. "All you will give up is your life!"

"Your boss won't like that," Shayne said calmly. All he could do was try to run a bluff.

"We live for the Black Lotus," one of the others said, "and the Black Lotus has decreed death for all intruders."

"The Black Lotus sent me here —" Shayne began.

Cries of anger cut him off. The four Ninjas hovered over him, and their arms went up in position to come flashing down and batter the life from his body. Shayne's head was spinning crazily from all the

fumes he had inhaled, but he got ready to at least go out fighting.

A shot cracked. One of the Ninjas clapped a hand to his forehead with a shriek of agony and folded up on the wooden floor. Shayne heard a voice yell, "Come on! Let's show these goddamn bastards who runs this town!"

More shots rang out, and the remaining Ninjas forgot about Shayne. They sprang away from him to meet this new attack, and Shayne gratefully rolled over to the wall and used it as a brace to climb to his feet.

He could see figures scurrying here and there, shooting and fighting with the Ninjas. The gunfire was deafening, and the muzzle flashes lit up the room nightmarishly. Shayne pushed away from the wall and started to stagger toward the door.

Someone right in front of him was splashing something on the floor from a can, and Shayne caught the acrid scent of gasoline. If it was lit, the whole place would go up, but that seemed to be what the man had in mind. He struck a match and yelled, "We'll burn the rats out!"

Shayne clubbed his hands together and leaped for him, smashing his fists into the back of the man's neck. He grabbed for the match as it fell from suddenly nerveless fingers, but the opium had slowed him down just enough.

The gasoline went up with a *whoosh!*

And the drugged figures in the aisle and on the couches watched with dull, uncaring eyes.

Shayne leaped for the door, slapping at his smoldering clothes, and slammed it open with his shoulder. He ran down the corridor, conscious of men running alongside him, but they weren't paying any attention to him. They were the attackers, anxious now only to get away, and it was likely they thought he was one of their own. The smoke made everything hazy and uncertain.

The fire was blazing brightly behind them as they made their way up the stairs, and Shayne could hear screams now. The heat was finally penetrating to the drug-sated addicts. There was a sick feeling in his stomach as he charged through the deserted warehouse, and the opium fumes weren't solely responsible.

The attackers turned one way in the alley, running frenziedly, Shayne turned the other, and they never missed him. He circled around, trying to get his bearings, shaking his head to clear some of the cobwebs ensnaring his brain. He spotted his Buick, all but fell into it, and started the engine. Down the street, he could see smoke and the running figures of passersby drawn by the fire in the warehouse. Someone must have called the fire department by now, but it was too late to do any good.

Shayne made a U-turn illegally and headed away from the place as fast as he could. He would remember those screams for a long time.

And he would remember the voices of the attackers, voices he had recognized.

Killian's men.

SHAYNE UNDERSTOOD NOW, SAW THE PICTURE CLEAR, despite the clinging effects of the smoke. It was a gang war, between Killian and the Black Lotus. Shepard Wong must have owed money to Killian and was ready to settle the debt by giving the mobster information about the Black Lotus. And then one of the Black Lotus's Ninjas had killed him to prevent his betrayal. Shayne didn't know whether Wong had been part of the Black Lotus organization or not, but that didn't matter. He would have known things about it, as all the Chinese seemed to know, things that a vicious competitor like Killian would have been anxious to find out. Wong might have been ready to tell Killian the location of the Chinese headquarters.

Shayne arranged the pieces in his brain, and they made a picture. It wasn't a pretty one, but it was all there, all except one piece. Shayne squeezed the steering wheel as he drove, concentrating, feeling that last piece floating around somewhere in his head. But he couldn't grasp it, and the nausea caused by the opium fumes was starting to wrack him. He had to find some place to sit down and rest until his head cleared. Then he could finish putting the puzzle together and ring the cops in. Settling a gang war of this magnitude was more than he could handle alone, but he felt like he had to do *something*.

The war had to end, before more people were killed.

Almost before he knew it, Shayne found himself in front of the Crimson Pagoda. It was late afternoon by now, and the parking lot should have been full, but it was empty instead. Shayne saw a note of some sort taped on the door, and by now he was a little steadier on his feet as he got out of his car and walked over to read it.

CLOSED FOR REMODELING, the sign read, but it looked hastily scrawled. Shayne didn't care if the place was closed or not, he wanted to see Leiko and tell her and Leon Ho what he had found out. Once they realized how serious the situation was, surely they would help him put pressure on the Chinese community until he discovered where the Black Lotus could be found.

He pounded on the door roughly, rattled the knob. A moment later, a voice Shayne recognized as Leon Ho's said from the other side of the door, "We are closed. Sorry, come back in a week or so."

"It's me, Ho," Shayne called back. "Mike Shayne. I've got to talk to you."

"Shayne . . . !" A second later the door swung open. Ho beckoned him in. "What are you doing here? What has happened to you?"

"I found it all out," Shayne said. "I know about the Black Lotus, and I know why Killian's men were in Wong's apartment. Most importantly, I think I know why the Black Lotus had Wong killed."

"What are you talking about?" Ho hissed. The big room behind him was vacant and dim, the chairs turned up on the tables. "I know nothing about any Black Lotus, like I told you."

"Sure you do," Shayne said. He was starting to feel a little bleary again, his headache coming and going. "You don't have to be afraid anymore. I'm going to go to the cops, and it won't be long until the Black Lotus is gone for good."

"Is that so?" Ho asked slowly, folding his arms.

"Yeah. Is Leiko here?" There didn't seem to be anyone else in the place.

"Yes, Leiko is here," Ho said. He snapped his fingers.

Shayne heard a sound, and he turned his head. The blank wall he had noted on his first visit to the restaurant was no longer blank. There was a door in it, a door that was opening slowly. Shayne could see that when it was closed, it would be flush with the wall and all but invisible.

He could also see Leiko Smith stepping out through the door.

Her gaze was wistful as she looked at him and said, "Mike, you never should have come here."

Shayne was confused, getting more groggy by the minute. The feeling increased as Leiko came toward him, leaving the door open behind her. Through it, he glimpsed a foyer, decorated in Chinese style, with a brass gong standing in it, like the ones outside, only smaller.

Leiko was only inches from him now, and her arms were outstretched. It seemed to be the thing to do to go into them, putting his own arms around her and holding her tightly against him. Her special scent enveloped him, and he could hear the throbbing of his own heart. As he listened, the throbbing merged with another sound, a deep, bell-like sound. His eyes wanted to close, but he forced them to stay open, to look past Leiko to Ho, standing there with a small, triumphant smile on his face.

And beyond Ho, standing in the foyer and striking the gong with a brass mallet, was a deadly figure in black silk. A nightmare in smoke . . .

*Leiko!*

The thought rang through Shayne's head, along with the beating of his heart and the tolling of the gong, and then he felt himself going down.

He never felt himself hit bottom . . .

## VIII

### THE FIRST THING SHAYNE KNEW WAS THE MUSIC.

The clear, sweet notes rippled around him, showering him with lovely sounds. He had never heard music quite like it before, and to his surprise, he found himself liking it. In fact, he was awash in a deep sea of contentment. He had never felt such euphoria, such an overpowering sense of well-being.

His eyes were closed, and for the moment, it was easier to keep them that way. He stretched his body, feeling the smooth softness beneath him, and somewhere in his brain, he realized that he was in a bed fitted with silk sheets. From the feel of it, he knew he had to be nude, but he didn't care.

The music kept playing, and Shayne's senses were suddenly deluged with sensation. A heady fragrance filled his nostrils, and he felt warmth against him, moving over him, covering him completely with its soft caress.

His arms came up and tightened around the warmth, holding it to him so that he could draw from it. The perfume was stronger than ever, and the delicate whisper of breath touched his ear. His eyes opened.

And stared into dark eyes that were full of passion and sadness.

"Oh, Mike," Leiko said softly, "why could you not give up before it was too late? Why did you have to keep finding out things?"

She was nude, pressed tightly against him, and the touch of her body was glorious. Shayne felt his excitement rising and he drew her closer, but the part of his brain that was still rational demanded an explanation of what she had just said and what he was doing there.

His lips struggled to form the questions, but they wouldn't come. The words took too much effort, and besides, Leiko's mouth had come down on his, wetly and hungrily.

It was so easy to kiss her . . . Too hard to ask questions!

He had caught a glimpse of the room before his eyes closed again. It was small, most of its floor space taken up by the luxurious bed. There was a large rug hanging on one wall, elaborately woven to form a picture of a fierce, fire-snorting dragon. On the other wall was a picture of a flower —

*Black Lotus!* The words burned in Shayne's brain.

But he couldn't do anything about them. He was too busy kissing Leiko. He felt like his entire being was aflame with desire now, and his hands were running up and down her back, swooping down to explore the secret places of her body. Her figure, so slim in clothes, was surprisingly lush when she was nude.

Leiko broke the kiss with a gasp and cried out, "Mike! My God, I love you!"

Something was still keeping Shayne from talking, but he no longer cared. There seemed to be mist in the room, and it had filtered into his brain as well. This room, this bed, was all that there was in the universe, and he and Leiko were its only inhabitants. There was no holding back now.

They merged on the silk sheets, Leiko twisting and writhing in an explosion of passion. It was a timeless time, filled with warmth and soft cries. Shayne was caught up, as if by a giant hand, dangled above a bottomless abyss. And when the hand dropped him, he fell eagerly, welcoming the fall, plunging into the deep warm darkness and plummeting forever and ever.

And then Leiko caught him, her arms twining around him and squeezing with an incredible strength as she let out a scream that echoed in his ears for an eternity . . .

**BUT ETERNITY ENDED, AND SHAYNE FOUND HIMSELF** in the bed again, arms still around Leiko, her face resting against the mat of red hair on his chest. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing rapidly, a fine film of perspiration covering her face. Shayne ran his hands along the smooth planes of her back, feeling the taut skin, then lifted his fingers to stroke her fine, raven's-wing hair that cascaded around Leiko's head.

Shayne felt his heart pounding, still beating wildly after the cataclysm of their love-making. And as it pounded, it sent blood and adrenaline coursing through his veins, cleaning out whatever it was they had drugged him with. He took deep lungfuls of air, held them, and released them slowly.

And as the seconds passed, Shayne found that his mind was becoming shockingly, horribly, clear.

The Ninja in his apartment had called him a fool, and Shayne tasted the bitter, galling knowledge that the man in black had been right. He had been suspicious of nearly all the Orientals he had questioned in the last two days, all but the ones who were being so helpful and friendly — Leiko and Leon Ho. He had been taken in by them, all



right, keeping them up to date on all his movements and thoughts, dining there in what was very likely the headquarters of the Black Lotus.

He felt a fury building up inside him, even as he lay there reveling in the glorious touch of Leiko's creamy flesh. Leiko! The loyal assistant, eager to help him! In reality, a watchdog, assigned by Leon Ho to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't get too close to the truth.

Still, Shayne's anger wasn't directed at her. She was probably just a pawn in this game. But at least she would fool him no longer.

As if reading his mind, she opened her eyes at that moment and saw him staring at her. At first, a smile gently curved her lips, but when she saw the grim coldness of his face, her look turned to one of disappointment.

"Your mind is clear again," she said softly. "You are a great warrior, worthy to be a Ninja, and no drug can affect you for long. Mike . . ."

He found that he could speak again. "It's no good, Leiko. I'm no Ninja, and you know it. I'm just a threat to the organization you belong to. What happens to me now? Was this the granting of a last wish to the condemned man?" His voice was harsh.

"No!" she cried. "Do not say such things! I wish it was all different." Her voice dropped, became more urgent, more earnest. "When this began, I thought only of my duty, but as I spent time with you, I realized what a good man you are. I do not wish to see you harmed, but you have learned the secret of the Black Lotus! Such a thing is forbidden."

Shayne took her arms from around him and moved out from under her. He sat up and swung his legs off the bed. He felt twinges of pain from his bruises and sore muscles now. Earlier, under the influence of who knows what drug, he had felt no pain at all, only desire for this lovely but treacherous butterfly.

He started to stand, but Leiko embraced him again, this time from behind, her hands stroking his chest lingeringly.

"Stay with me, Mike!" she cried. "Let it last a little longer, a few precious moments longer."

He tore himself out of her grip and stood up. "It's no good!" he said savagely, spinning to face her. "Your bosses are going to kill me, unless I do something to stop them. Anyway, I don't intend to go peacefully!"

There was a plain wooden door leading out of the room. Shayne had taken a step toward it when Leiko said, "I'm sorry it has to be this way, Mike . . ."

She pulled a cord hanging by the bed, and a mist suddenly filled the room again. Shayne caught a whiff of it, recognized the scent as that of Leiko's perfume, only a hundred times stronger, and lunged for the door.

He took two more steps before the lethargy hit him, and then he felt his knees buckle, spilling him to the thick carpet on the floor. He heard the soft padding of bare feet, and then Leiko was standing over him. Her face still had sorrow on it, but in her eyes was cold acceptance. She said, "That is the way it will have to be, then. I am truly sorry. We can delay no longer, though."

She clapped her hands, and the door swung open. Two of the Ninjas entered. Leiko stood there, completely unashamed of her nudity. As the world began to spin around him again. Shayne saw that the Ninjas kept their eyes averted from her.

Leiko said in a sharp voice, "Take him out and clothe him. I will be out shortly and we will proceed."

The men in black bent to grasp Shayne's arms and legs, and one of them said in humble tones, "We obey your commands, Black Lotus."

They picked him up and carried him out, and the last things Shayne saw before he lost consciousness again, were the dragon and the flower...

## IX

IT DIDN'T SEEM HE WAS OUT AS LONG THIS TIME, and he probably wasn't. He was lying down again when he came to, but he wasn't in a soft bed. Instead, he was on a hard stone floor. There were no bonds on his hands and feet, so he came to a sitting position, feeling his sore muscles protest.

He had been dressed again, in his pants and shirt, so that was a little improvement. A naked man feels just that much more defenseless. And as Shayne glanced around him, he saw that he was going to need any edge he could come up with.

Four Ninjas surrounded him, one on each side and two behind him. They all carried the wicked-looking swords, and their eyes glowed with hatred behind the slits of their masks. Shayne knew they could chop him into pieces in seconds.

This room was large, and Shayne had a feeling it was in the basement somewhere below the Crimson Pagoda. It was lit by candles placed in niches in the wall. The walls were stone, like the floor, and covered with tapestries. The pictures they formed were exquisite, but Shayne didn't feel like admiring them. Directly in front of him were

two large chairs, almost throne-like in their aspect, one of them sitting on a low platform so that it was several inches higher than the other, though they were side by side. Leon Ho sat in the lower chair, contempt on his face as he gazed at Shayne.

The chair on the platform was more ornate. The seat was covered with a rich brocade, and its high, curved back was decorated with a painting of a dragon curled upon itself, flame spurting from its nostrils.

Leiko Smith sat in the chair, looking serenely down at him.

—No, Shayne told himself, Leiko Smith was gone. This was the Black Lotus, incarnate.

Her black hair, no longer loose and flowing, was braided on top of her head and held in place with a jewel-covered clip. Long earrings dangled from her ears, and they were studded with gems, too. She wore a simple green dress that made her look entirely elegant. She was stunning, and the American side of her was gone, vanished, replaced by enigmatic Eastern beauty. She was totally Chinese now, the Black Lotus and nothing else.

She looked down at him, and Shayne saw something akin to a flicker of pity in her eyes, but it lasted only a split-second and then was gone.

“You have learned the secret of the Black Lotus, Michael Shayne,” she said solemnly. “For that, you must die.”

Shayne felt his anger surging up, and despite the presence of the Ninjas around him, he found himself getting painfully to his feet. The men in black tensed, but the Black Lotus raised one long-nailed finger, and they stepped back.

“You deserve to be on your feet,” she said. “You are a danger to us, but you are still a man, and should be treated as one.”

“He should be hacked to pieces immediately,” Ho burst out, “before he can cause any more trouble.”

“He will cause no more trouble. And you would do well to remember, Ho, that you are only my second-in-command. We are not equals!” The Black Lotus’s tone was sharp.

Ho looked properly chastized, but resentment lurked in his eyes. Shayne noted that, knowing that his only chance might rest on such a development.

The Black Lotus looked at Shayne again, and her voice had softened somewhat. “I regret that you must die, but such are the rules. And our society is founded on rules. There must be order, especially among thieves.”

Shayne’s gray eyes glared at her coldly, and he said, “If I’m going to die anyway, you won’t mind answering a few questions, will you?”

Ho started to say something, but at a look from the woman seated

above him; he kept quiet. She said, "You shall go to your death with your mind satisfied. What do you wish to know?"

"You sent a Ninja to kill Shepard Wong, didn't you?"

"Of course. Wong was going to betray us. He knew of our operation here, as do all of the restaurant employees, even though he was not a member of our group. When he found himself in debt to the gangster Killian, he planned to betray us in exchange for his worthless life. Killian resents very much the fact that another group is operating in territory he considers his own, and he would wipe us out if he could. Tonight his men raided one of our establishments, as I believe you already know. I do not know how he found out about it. Someone said something they shouldn't have, and when we find out who it was, then he will never speak again. I shall have his tongue."

Shayne repressed the shudder that ran through him and said, "You've got more of those opium dens?"

"Yes. We have also become involved in the drug traffic off the coast, as well as gambling and prostitution here in the city. We are, as I believe the Americans say, diversified. Ours is a lucrative business, and we have worked long and hard to build it up. I have recruited the best people in the Oriental community for our organization, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, even Vietnamese. We can let nothing threaten it now. That is why I have invited Killian here tonight."

Shayne couldn't conceal the surprise he felt. From the look on Ho's face, he knew about the Black Lotus's invitation, and didn't like it.

The beautiful woman in the green dress went on, "We cannot afford this gang war, and Killian must see that. If it continues, it could be disastrous for both sides. There must be a truce. Surely Killian will agree."

"I wouldn't bet on it," Shayne said dryly. "He knew that Wong was ready to sell you out. Wong must have put some feelers out with him. That's why Killian had his boys going over Wong's apartment, looking for anything that the guy might have written down and concealed. But the only thing Wong had hidden was that letter to me."

"And I wish the police had never found it," the Black Lotus said. "Then you would never have been involved."

The missing piece Shayne had been looking for earlier fell into place then. He said, "I should have known, a long time before I did. When the Ninja came to my apartment to kill me, he mentioned the letter. I hadn't told anyone involved in the case about it except you and Ho. He had to have found out from you."

"Yes. That is true."

"Why send him to kill me? You had me completely fooled, and you

were keeping an eye on me."

"We did not send him to kill you," Leiko said emphatically. "He went on his own, feeling that his honor had been compromised by his failure to find the letter Wong had written. Killing you was the only way he could see to remove the blot of failure. When I found out about it, I sent men after him to stop him, but it was too late. They were able to spirit his body away, though, before you could call the police."

Shayne found himself grinning crookedly, despite the bitterness and anger he felt. He said, "You really had me on a leash, didn't you? You stayed right with me as much as you could with that perfume of yours, keeping an eye on me and keeping me a little high at the same time. What is it?"

The Black Lotus permitted herself a tiny smile. "Is not a woman allowed to have any secrets? It is a drug recently perfected in Red China and smuggled to me. Depending on the concentration of it, it can act as a mild aphrodisiac or a depressant. I've been desensitized to it, but to a person like yourself, it can be very powerful and disconcerting. The quantity of it in my perfume was enough to keep your mind just slightly off-balance."

Shayne nodded. "I thought as much. When I came here from the opium den, I was high to start with, and then you hit me with a strong dose of that stuff. No wonder I was knocked for a loop. I've just got one more question." He paused. "Why, Leiko? Why you?"

He could see her composure crack just for a second, the mask slipping and revealing the woman underneath. She said, "You could never understand. You cannot know what it is like to grow up where I did; surrounded by people, teeming mobs that care nothing for you, with a stepfather who beats you and uses you as a toy! My family was ruined by drugs and crime, and I grew up on the streets, taking what I had to, doing what I had to, in order to survive. I decided that since evil had taken away my chance for a normal life, then evil would at least supply me with a living. And now it has become more than that. Evil has given me luxury, and the chance to live again. I will not lose that . . . even for a man like you, who has touched me as no man has ever touched me before."

She took a deep breath and raised her hand to gesture to the Ninja. Shayne tensed, ready to make a last stand.

"Mistress!"

The voice came from an entrance that was covered with a curtain of hanging beads. One of the Ninjas stood there. When the Black Lotus looked over at him, he said, "Killian is here, Mistress, but he will not come in without his men. He says he is ready to talk."

The Black Lotus glanced over at Ho, then said, "Killian may come in here, *alone*. His men can stay in the outer room if he wishes, though. We cannot blame him for being cautious."

Ho couldn't restrain himself. "I still think this is a mistake —"

"I am aware of your feelings on this matter, Ho. And I will do what I think best." To the Ninja, she said, "Bring Killian."

When he had ducked back through the beads, she said to the men in black surrounding Shayne, "Go into the outer room with your brothers. Killian may be planning some treachery. If he is, show no mercy to his men."

The Ninjas padded out on silent feet, and Shayne was left alone with the Black Lotus and Ho. He said, "Do you really trust Killian?"

The Black Lotus smiled. "I trust no one completely. No one except myself."

A moment of silence went by. Shayne stood in the center of the room, watching the two people in the chairs, knowing that his planned death had only been postponed. Ho was lounging in his seat negligently, his face a study in arrogance and evil, while the Black Lotus sat upright, her lovely face composed again, her dark eyes serene. Shayne could see candlelight flickering in them.

The beads clattered and parted, and Killian stepped through. His face was hard and angry, but he had his emotions under tight control. Beyond him, through the beads, Shayne could see into the outer room. There were nine or ten of Killian's men standing around, looking uncomfortable, and an equal number of the Black Lotus's Ninjas, all with swords in their hands.

The Black Lotus inclined her head toward Killian and said, "Welcome to my home. You are aware of why I asked you to come here?"

"You want to talk truce," Killian said shortly. "Or you thought you could trap me."

"It was the former, I assure you. Mr. Killian, I have trusted you enough to reveal my headquarters to you. You can do me the courtesy of trusting us enough to listen to our proposal."

"All right," Killian said grudgingly. "I'm listening."

The Black Lotus turned toward her second-in-command and said, "Ho."

Ho said, "Simply put, this is what we suggest: a division of rights in this town, with each of us controlling a certain percentage of the narcotics traffic, the gambling, the prostitution. Under our plan, they would be split down the middle, fifty-fifty."

Killian glared at them. "How long have you been in Miami?"

Ho frowned. "A little over two years. Why?"

"My people, and the people I represent, have been here since the Twenties. We're not going to just turn over half of our business to a bunch of slant-eyed newcomers."

"Racial insults are unnecessary," the Black Lotus said. "The only alternative to our plan, Mr. Killian, is warfare. Many lives would be lost in that case, more than either of our organizations can afford. Is this what you want?"

"Of course not. Let me think about this." Killian paused to look at Shayne. "What's this shamus doing here?"

"Mr. Shayne will be leaving soon," Ho said. "You do not have to worry about him."

Killian looked back at the Black Lotus. "Fifty-fifty is your final offer?"

"We think it only fair."

"Well, I think you're all a bunch of yellow bastards."

The Black Lotus's face tightened. "That is your answer?"

"No," Killian said. "This is!"

His hand darted under his coat and came out holding a gun. He leveled it at the Black Lotus with a snarl and yelled, "Get them, kill all of them!"

Shayne saw it all in slow motion, his brain still affected slightly by all the drugs he had been exposed to. Killian's gun came up, and on the other side of the beaded curtain, his men lunged for their own weapons. The Ninjas swooped toward them, swords held high. Shayne had time to think only how foolish, how wasteful it all was.

And then he was throwing himself forward, crashing into Killian and knocking him off-balance. The mobster's gun blasted, but the slug hit only the stone floor, ricocheting off wildly.

Ho and the Black Lotus were moving, too. The Black Lotus reached out calmly and pulled a silken cord hanging near her chair. Shayne expected something to happen, but he never expected the steel door that slammed down in place of the beads, cutting them off from the battle in the room outside. Ho reached behind his chair, came out with a twin to the Ninjas' swords, and leaped from his chair with a cry.

Killian tried to regain his balance, but he was too late. The blade in Ho's hand flashed, and a foot of steel buried itself in the gang leader's belly. He screamed and grabbed at the sword. Ho jerked it out, releasing a torrent of red. Killian folded up on the floor, writhing for only a few seconds before he became still.

Ho turned toward Shayne, blood dripping from the sword in his hand, and hissed, "Now it is your turn, dog."

Shayne came up on his toes, ready to dodge either way. He growled.

"I'm getting tired of being called that."

"Ho!" The Black Lotus's voice cracked out. "I gave you no orders!"

"Be damned to your orders! I have followed them long enough. I taught you much of what you know, and now you spurn me! It is time I reclaimed my rightful place!"

He lunged forward, swinging the sword savagely at Shayne.

Shayne threw himself to the side. The blade slashed past him, missing by several inches, but before he could recover and launch a kick of his own, Ho's foot slammed into his side in a vicious kick, and he felt himself falling.

He remembered Ho telling him that he had been an instructor in the martial arts. He believed it now, as the once gentle-seeming restaurateur was replaced by a leaping, twisting, hacking demon. Shayne leaped from side to side desperately, barely avoiding the sword thrusts but being battered by the blows Ho threw with his feet and free hand. There were shots and cries coming from the outer room, but Shayne never heard them. He was too busy trying to stay alive.

The Black Lotus seemed not to hear them, either. She was transfixed on her throne, sitting forward and clutching the arms of it, her splendid bosom rising and falling slowly as she watched the battle between her lieutenant and the big red-headed detective who had briefly been her lover.

Shayne's lungs burned in his chest. His reserves of strength were just about gone, drained by the last two days. In minutes, perhaps even seconds, his foot would slip, or he would react just a bit too slowly, and his life would be over, hewn away from him by the little man with the sword.

A shot —

And Leon Ho screamed.

The sword slipped from his fingers, and he clawed at his back. Taking two unsteady steps, he suddenly pitched forward on his face. Shayne saw the red stain on the back of his coat. He turned slowly toward the throne.

The Black Lotus was standing now, a small pistol in her fist. Her face was a jumble of emotions, and then it cracked. Shayne saw Leiko Smith again, as she rushed toward him, dropping the pistol and coming into his arms.

"I could not let him kill you!" she cried, burying her face against his chest. "I have never met a man like you. I cannot let you die!"

Shayne tried to catch his breath. His arms had gone around her



instinctively, and now he said slowly, "It's all right, all right . . . Thank you, Leiko."

She tilted her face up to look at him, and he could see the tears running down her silken cheeks. "Join me!" she pleaded. "I need you to help me. Together, we can rebuild what has been lost today." Shots were still ringing from the outer room, but they were fewer now. "Please join me, Mike. I want you —"

She saw the look on his face and broke off. He shook his head grimly. There were deep hollows in his cheeks. "You know I can't," he told her. "If you let me live, I'll have to tell the police what I know. The organization of the Black Lotus will be broken."

"Oh, Mike . . . !" she wailed.

And then over her shoulder, he saw the wavering hand of Leon Ho reach out and pick up the gun she had dropped. Ho lifted it and cried, "You will go with *me*, Mistress!" There was bloody foam on his lips.

Shayne threw Leiko to the side desperately and leaped toward Ho. If he could knock the pistol aside . . .

The gun cracked. Shayne felt a burning fist slam into his chest, and he was suddenly falling out of control again, over that dark, bottomless abyss, and this time there was no one there to catch him.

## EPILOGUE

WHEN HE AWAKENED, HE WAS SURROUNDED BY DEATH. Killian was lying in a pool of blood before the thrones, and Ho was sprawled not far from him, the little pistol lying beside his limp fingers.

Shayne sat up slowly, waiting to pass out again. When it didn't happen, he climbed slowly to his feet.

There was a dull ache in his chest, and his shirt was covered with blood. Shayne knew how lucky he was, though. He could tell that the bullet had gone straight through, without hitting anything vital, merely ripping through the muscle between his chest and shoulder. Now, if he just didn't go into shock . . .

He jerked the cord next to the Black Lotus's chair, and as he had hoped, the steel door rose slowly.

The scene in the outer room was a vision from Hell, a nightmare of carnage and massacre. The Ninjas and Killian's men had wiped each other out. Shayne knew that both gangs would probably collapse now, crippled by the day's violence.

He had to get to a phone, summon the cops and an ambulance. He

started through the outer room, heading upstairs to the restaurant that had appeared so innocent.

Then he stopped and looked back into the square, stonewalled room with its tapestries and thrones and death, and he wondered if he would ever see her again.

Leiko . . . the Black Lotus . . . was gone.

Next Month  
Mike Shayne returns in

ODDS ON DEATH  
by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

#### RETAIL DISPLAY ALLOWANCE

##### TO MAGAZINE RETAILERS:

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE is pleased to announce its "Retail Display Allowance Plan" available to retailers interested in earning a display allowance of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. To obtain details and a copy of the formal contract, please write to the Marketing Department, Kable News Company, Inc., 777 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10017, our national distributor, who will act as administrator of our plan. Under our Retail Display Allowance Plan, in consideration for fulfilling conditions of the agreement, you will be entitled to receive a display allowance. This plan will become effective for all issues you receive subsequent to Kable News Company, Inc.'s written acceptance on our behalf of your application.

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*The young man seemed very nice. But he was lying to her about some very basic things. Victoria Pennywaite knew her curiosity wouldn't let her ignore the problem. She also know that sometimes curiosity killed . . .*

# THE MAN IN THE HUBERLIN PLACE

by JERRY JACOBSON

DRIVING FROM BOSTON THAT MORNING, Miss Pennywaite could see ice forming on the Charles. Bicycling students bound for Harvard or Boston University had their necks wrapped with thick scarves and wool caps pulled down over their ears. Miss Pennywaite smiled at them. Only the wise could escape Boston's dreary winter, the wise and the rich. Miss Pennywaite enjoyed the good fortune to be both.

This would mark her thirteenth escape and her thirteenth winter book. Miss Pennywaite did not write summer books, because the moods of her nasty, complex mystery thrillers would be bid up only during the year's bleaker months. Her summers were painful, seemingly endless periods of time spent at book club luncheons where she signed autographs and at undergraduate English seminars where she stood up before gawking students who both listened to her reveal the writers' secrets and gazed for free at a relic, recluse and living legend whose literary output held them in stunned silence. She prowled bookstores and haunted museums and watched video cassettes of old detective movies, always keeping one fidgety eye on the calendar, her mind peeling the pages away to the September equinox. She did not formally recognize spring or summer as genuine parts of the year.

At noon, she passed into Barnstable County and through bleak and battened-down Buzzard's Bay, moving the classic white Duesenberg Torpedo Phaeton through a chill mist clinging to the ground of the lifeless peninsula, the battalion of four carburetors whining like a perfect generator from beneath the endless auto hood thrust out before her eyes. Though there wasn't a soul to hear or witness, Miss Pennywaite gave the twin airhorns three long blasts in symbolic arrival.

Six miles more and the icy waters of Nantucket Sound loomed

beyond the narrow windshield, then slipped to the corner of Miss Pennywaite's right eye as she swung the Duesenberg north. She gave scarcely a glance as the enclaves of New England's supra-rich slid down the rain-spattered windows of the Duesenberg — Falmouth, Yarmouth, Hyannis Port, though she did wonder how many copies of her books had found their way inside those forbidding hedges and high iron fences and onto coffee tables and bedroom nightstands.

Beyond Hyannis, the settlements of the peninsula began to string themselves out more distantly. The fine, sheltered estates of Massachusetts' old money were transformed into sturdy, two-story houses of wood, with bricked half-basements. They were set hard against the choppy sound, their rear yards a barren tapestry of sand dunes. White picket fences marking property lines were bent backward in an endless line of faint resistance against decades of surging tides.

Miss Pennywaite's winter retreat was one of these hardy houses, one of a dozen strung along Nantucket Road on the sound side of the highway between communities of South Harwich and South Chatham. Unallied with either town, their residents enjoyed a suburban anonymity without benefit of incorporation or the burden of local taxation. Always a loner and hardy individualist, Miss Pennywaite liked that just fine.

**A MILE BEYOND SOUTH HARWICH** Miss Pennywaite pulled the Phaeton onto hard-packed gravel in front of South Harwich General Store. Miss Pennywaite fought through a driving misty rain and in a moment was standing in the warmth of commonwealth history where barrels of smoked kippers and pickled herring stood ranked on hardwood floors dulled and eroded by two centuries of customers. Mackinaw coats sold out here every winter and so did Massachusetts wines and fresh cod and white latex house paint.

Although the store looked vacant, Miss Pennywaite's nose picked out the aroma of pipe smoke, so she spoke up, "Mr. McCauliffe? If you don't get out here to wait on your customers, an old woman is going to steal you blind!"

From somewhere deep in the rear of the store, a raspy, ancient male voice with an unmistakable New England twang answered, "Victoria Pennywaite? Is that you? Dear woman, if you robbed from me, you would have no choice but to expose your crime in your next book and then you'd be on the run the rest of your days!"

When Edgar McCauliffe appeared, there wasn't much of him to see. He stood barely five feet tall and was the shortest adult human Miss Pennywaite had ever known. When he came forward to administer a

hug of greeting, Miss Pennywaite, a larger than average human herself, tempered her reciprocity.

"The winter book, Miss Pennywaite?"

"The winter book, Mr. McCauliffe. I'll be needing enough staples for two months at the least. Pork and beans, vegetables, stew meat, wines, cleaning solvents, four cords of dry cedar. Does Amos Speers still cut and deliver splits?"

"It's the oldest boy does it now, Victoria, what with Amos' back breakin' down on him last April. That'd be Seth. I'll give him a call in the morning. Four cord did you say, Miss Pennywaite?"

"Does Tom Huberlin agree this will be a four-cord winter?"

Huberlin was the only other winter resident in the twelve homes strung along the bayfront between South Harwich and South Chatham. A former weatherman for a Boston television station and a widower, Huberlin was the closest thing Miss Pennywaite had to a neighbor during these winters. They exchanged visits often and though they were not romantically entangled, Miss Pennywaite felt a special fondness for this soft-spoken, sad-faced man. As an amateur astronomer, Huberlin was fond of showing her the minutia of the heavens through one telescopic contraption or another while Miss Pennywaite spoonfed him the early rough-draft chapters of her latest book and often took his opinions and criticisms to heart.

With her question, there seemed all at once to come across the pinched face of Edgar McCauliffe an expression of both pity and grief — pity because Miss Pennywaite had not yet heard the tragic news, and grief because Mr. McCauliffe was now forced by time and circumstances to be its reluctant bearer.

"Miss Pennywaite . . ."

"Is something wrong, Mr. McCauliffe?"

"Miss Pennywaite, Tom Huberlin is dead. Last May."

"What happened?"

"Heart," said McCauliffe solemnly. "It broke pretty bad when Louisa died and never really healed. I kinda think that's why he took up with astronomy and those telescopes. With Louisa gone, I guess Tom felt there wasn't much left for him on earth and so he turned from it and began gazing out into space."

"What about the house?" Victoria Pennywaite asked. "That lovely old house?"

"The daughter came down from Schenectady after the funeral to sort out all her father's possessions. I think his only boy came with her. Lives in Canada someplace. The telescopes were sold at auction. Pity. Such expensive equipment sold for pennies. But I guess the kids

weren't stargazers."

"Then the Huberlin place has been sold."

"Oh, no, Miss Pennywaite," McCauliffe told her. "The daughter listed it for lease with a Boston real estate firm. Somebody in it now, as a matter of fact."

"A family?"

"A fellow. Name's Argus Greene. Let's see, I think he moved in around the end of August. Stops in once a week for groceries."

There seemed something that was almost criminal about a stranger so quickly usurping the space of a human so recently deceased. But perhaps he did not know the tragic circumstances when he signed the lease. After all, a house was just a house unless you made it a point to ask if it had a history or a legacy. Victoria Pennywaite tried valiantly not to think unkindly of Argus Greene. He had merely moved into a vacant house, not danced upon another man's coffin.

"If you'll see to my staples and cedar splits as soon as it is convenient, Mr. McCauliffe."

"I'll call Seth right now about the cedar and then make up your boxes. Good luck with the winter book, Miss Pennywaite."

"Luck, Mr. McCauliffe," Miss Pennywaite told him as she put her gloves back on, "has absolutely nothing to do with it."

THE HOUSE APPEARED NOT TO HAVE SUFFERED GREATLY from another spring and summer of abandonment. Miss Pennywaite uncovered the sturdy, ageless walnut couch and chairs, vacuumed carpets, industriously dusted bookshelves, counters, nooks and crannies, and built a fire in the livingroom fireplace with the skimpy remains of the previous winter's cedar.

Each small task and act gradually transformed a house into a home and by midnight Miss Pennywaite, never a soul to put off work when it was at hand, had her chapter outlines spread out on the floor before the anemic fire, going over them on her hands and knees like someone searching for a contact lens. Her preparations looked thorough, her plot solid and suspenseful, her characters well-defined and multi-dimensional. The writing should take six-to-eight weeks, no more. Let her critics scoff at the blinding speed at which her winter books were churned out. If one were to believe everything they wrote, success depended almost solely upon staring at bare walls for a year, imprisoning oneself in a hovel on bread and water for another, and hacking off bodily parts for a third. Nonsense. Miss Pennywaite had a standard retort for that kind of lofty, fuzzy thinking. One could spend half a lifetime polishing the family silver; but sooner or later, it had to

be put out for inspection and use.

It was shortly after one a.m. when the front doorknocker sounded. Unperturbed, Miss Pennywaite hiked herself up from the floor, walked down a short stretch of hallway to the door, opened the tiny security door of brass set slightly above eye-level, and peered through the vertical bars at a bearded man in a hooded raincoat whose smile looked cordial and harmless.

"Miss Pennywaite? I'm Argus Greene. I'm leasing the Huberlin place. I saw you drive by the house in that legendary Duesenberg everybody talks about around here. Thought I'd stop in and see if there's anything you might need."

Miss Pennywaite saw he was holding up a large grocery sack with a wine bottle sprouting from the top.

"French burgundy," he announced. "*Mazis-Chambertin 1969. Vin Delimite de Qualite*. And some winter squash and a goodly portion of a chicken casserole left over from last night."

Once invited inside and in better light, Miss Pennywaite could see immediately that Argus Green was younger than he had appeared on the porch, in fact very young, perhaps in his middle twenties. His height and the thick beard lent most of the illusion and his deep, bass voice contributed to the rest.

Graciously, Miss Pennywaite accepted the parcel and took it into the kitchen. She opened the wine and put the casserole into the oven to warm. Argus Greene had meanwhile taken up a place in the kitchen doorway. "The squash should keep a good long while if it's kept in a cool, dry place," he suggested.

"It certainly looks hardy," said Miss Pennywaite. "Did you grow it?"

"No, it was growing in a side garden when I leased the Huberlin place. I waited through the fall for the owner to come by and pick it, but when the vines began to wither, I took them in. Did you know the house's previous owner?"

The words of her answer caught in Miss Pennywaite's throat briefly before they became release. "Tom Huberlin, yes. We were very close friends."

"Seems a shame to have to give up a fine house like that one," Greene told her. "It's a little drafty in places, but other than that, it's as sound as a French fortress."

Miss Pennywaite poured the wine and handed Argus Greene a glassful. "Sadly, Mr. Huberlin enjoyed no decision in the matter of sale or lease of his property. He passed on last spring and his heirs chose to put the house up for lease."

"I'm sorry, Miss Pennywaite. I didn't know."

"Young man, how *could* you know? You took a lease on a bayshore house; you didn't purchase the grief of the world. Now, let's get back into the livingroom and finish our wine, and you can tell me a little about yourself."

The remark seemed to relax the bearded face for the moment. They returned to the livingroom, where Miss Pennywaite tossed two cedar splits on the dwindling fire and then took a seat in her favorite chair across from Argus Greene, whom she directed to the couch. She had not yet entirely dismissed the fact that he was still an intruder in her bereavement for Tom Huberlin, but neither could she dismiss that her guest seemed to be a pleasant, unassuming young man who wanted genuinely to make friends with a neighbor.

Miss Pennywaite took another sip of the French wine, pronounced it far better than she deserved and then said, "Tell me, Mr. Greene, you look young enough to be a student. Are you?"

"No, Ma'am, not presently." The young man ran fingers through his beard, as if he were arranging his memories. "I got in on the tail-end of Vietnam, got my G-I bill, but haven't done much with it. It's a continuing embarrassment to my family to be sure. But setting up artificial goals simply to please your family leads to dissatisfaction and, in the end, resentment."

"A young man without a commitment . . . that's a tragic waste."

Argus Greene drew a sip of wine. "And *premature* commitment," he said to Miss Pennywaite, "can be a far greater waste. Let me tell you, I paint. Would it surprise you to learn that mundane little Boston University has one of the best fine arts departments on the East Coast?"

"I didn't know that," said Miss Pennywaite. "Did you go to school there?"

"A brief sojourn," Greene told her. "Landscapes, figure study, faking the masters."

"Fraudulent art?"

"Merely an exercise," said Argus Greene. "Sooner or later, everybody does it. You never saw so many perfect reproductions under one roof in your life. Velasquez, Van Gogh, Picasso. It was frightening to think half of them could have easily taken the place of the originals and fooled the entire world of art critics. I stayed a year there, wandering around the campus in my fatigue jacket, looking the proper war-torn, shell-shocked vet. I was leaving the others behind. Color, technique, the works. I hope you won't consider me overly boastful if I say I handle a brush like the old Italians themselves, as if I'd just



stepped from Ghirlandaio's Florentine classroom, arm-in-arm with a classmate named Michelangelo."

"That *is* quite a mouthful, all right," Miss Pennywaite agreed. "So now you've escaped to the shores of solitude and sanity."

"You can learn to paint in the city, but producing any work there is impossible. Boston's no longer the Renaissance City. It's fallen upon the same environmentally foul times of every other city in the country. Crime; doped-up kids, race hatred, and air you can slice and put on a plate. So now the artist chooses to be driven into the sea. So be it. If all of that follows me down the coast, I'll simply pick out a lighthouse somewhere."

Miss Pennywaite could smell the casserole's aroma wafting into the livingroom from the kitchen. Argus Greene looked ready to leave. The hour was growing late and he seemed now to begin to feel his intrusion.

"I'm keeping you up, Miss Pennywaite, I know. You want sleep and something to eat, and you want to get organized and give the muse a chance to get settled and accustomed to its surroundings." He was already up and heading for the door. "You must let me see some of the chapters of your new book once you have it underway."

"Only if you promise to be a severe critic, Mr. Greene, and not merely the gracious don where an old woman's feelings are concerned."

"If you'll understand you'll be getting critique from someone who is already one of your staunchest fans, Miss Pennywaite."

"Agreed, Mr. Greene. Now, I'd better be seeing to that casserole."

"Which, Miss Pennywaite," said Argus Greene as he returned from the doorway to once again assault the driving rain, "is not to be critiqued."

AT NINE THE FOLLOWING MORNING; Seth Spears nursed his father's decrepit pick-up down Miss Pennywaite's side driveway to the kitchen and began pitching cedar splits off the bed as though an official of the Guinness brewery had arrived from Dublin and was verifying an attempt at a world record.

The boy's maniacal heaving was being prompted with good reason. The morning had broken clear overhead, but to the north over Cape Cod Bay, ugly storm clouds were moving steadily southward, speeding before fierce winds which gave the bank of clouds the impression of being a time-lapse film study of nature's sudden fury. Amos had never dealt Miss Pennywaite a sodden piece of cedar in all the years she'd known him; perhaps it was a case of a father's good habits being

passed down to the son, or merely a matter of the suspended wrath of both a father and an old woman, waiting to be sent forth when two cords of wet cedar spent the winter drying instead of issuing warmth.

Less than an hour later, with the dark dome of angry clouds nearly overhead, Seth had the cords of cedar stacked against the house's east wall and draped with an anchored tarpaulin, out of the harmful way of the brutal northeast winds which swept down the cold Atlantic continually this time of year. In four trips, he had Miss Pennywaite's boxes of staples stored in the small walk-in pantry which in another time had served as a child's bedroom.

"Nasty nor'easter out there marching in like Attila the Hun stormin' 'crost Europe, Miss Pennywaite. It's gonna lose everything that ain't nailed down, that's for sure."

"'Tis the season, Seth. Could you do with a cup of hot coffee to help thaw you out a little?"

"Yes, Ma'am, sure could."

"And a Kaiser cheese roll?"

"Don't mind if I do, Miss Pennywaite."

Seth took a seat at the cramped breakfast nook and watched the rain. Miss Pennywaite served him and then took a seat across from him.

"How is your father's back mending, Seth?"

"Not so good, Miss Pennywaite. It gets about back to normal and then he decides he's Superman and does some fool heavy job or other around the house and gets it right back to ailin' again."

"Then it looks as though you've got yourself a fulltime winter job."

"If you don't find me frozen to death out in those hills someplace, with a chainsaw stuck in my fist, or a steel wedge stuck in my foot."

"It's a man's job. Seth, but I consider you to be every bit the man your father is. Tell me, have you met the young man who's leasing the Huberlin place?"

"Argus Greene? Yes, Ma'am. The artist. Got rich folks living in Lawrence, only they won't have anything to do with him out of the fact he's picked himself out a career with an uncertain future. Seems like a nice enough guy to me."

"And to me, as well," said Miss Pennywaite.

"One thing about him, though."

"Yes, Seth."

"A couple times I delivered his groceries when Mr. McCauliffe's boy was off down the cape on his runs."

"And?"

"And for a working artist he don't seem to waste much money on artist's supplies and such."

"How do you mean, Seth?"

"Well, I was in the Huberlin kitchen. You yourself been in Tom Huberlin's place lotsa times. He's got that long serving window that looks out into the dining room and livingroom."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, the curious thing of it is, Miss Pennywaite, there doesn't seem to be any artist's stuff strewn around. No easels, no paints, no pieces of canvas laying all over the place and stacked up against the wall."

"Well, his studio may be upstairs, Seth. Remember, Tom Huberlin put in those big, sliding windows across the east side of the second floor for his telescopes."

"I forgot about that," Seth Speers said.

"And all that eastern exposure catches a lot of morning sun," Miss Pennywaite added, "and fully half of the bayline is a still-life study. Not to mention it's in full view of at least two glide-paths for geese and herons in the spring."

"Well," said Seth a bit sheepishly now as he stared into a wedge of cheeseroll, "I guess that sure serves to explain why you're the writer and I'm the firewood dealer down this stretch of the woods, Miss Pennywaite. Yeah, he probably does *all* his work up there, all right. The painting. And the fretting and fuming and paint-slinging all those tempermental artist-types are famous for. Having pistol duels and cutting off their ears and all. I thank you for the coffee and roll, Miss Pennywaite. I got to be going. Still over ten cord of splits to haul out and store up before the worst of the storm hits us."

Miss Pennywaite walked Seth Speers to the kitchen door and paid him for the cedar.

"Another thing, Miss Pennywaite, about those steel anchoring pegs you've got driven into the ground to hold down the canvas on your cedar?"

"What about them, Seth?"

"Well, if we get more rain than freeze these next few weeks, a lot of that topsoil is going to get washed away. I'd keep an eye on those pegs, 'cause the first couple storms can loose them real easy. You're gonna halfta sledge them down a few whacks each to get them anchored deeper."

"I'll do as you suggest, Seth. Thanks for all your help this morning, and please express to your father my wishes for a strong back soon and a nice Christmas."

"And you have a real nice little Christmas yourself, Miss Pennywaite. And write out a real good book, so we all can keep being proud

of our best book writer."

"I'll do my best, Seth," Miss Pennywaite promised as the boy darted off under a downpour for the cab of the old pick-up.

The heavy, leaden clouds now made a perfect canopy over their heads, and the branches of trees seemed to be shivering less. A storm without high winds was a storm that might stay forever. Miss Pennywaite scurried down the back stairs and brought two dozen hunks of cedar up to the enclosed safety of the back porch.

FOR THREE DAYS THE STORM PERSISTED, a fierce, battering thing whose fury, had it moved up a scant notch, would have it officially registered as a full-blown hurricane. It was just the bleek, ghoulis kind of weather in which Miss Pennywaite did her best work. The darker souls in her mind came out almost barometrically: the hunted, the isolated, the haunted, the guilt-ridden, the tormented. It was beyond her how some of her peers did their best work in the midst of summer. The conjuring of suspense and mystery was hard enough, without making more work with lousy ambience.

During those foul, productive days, Miss Pennywaite often found her gaze trained west through the rain-streaked dining room window where, some five hundred yards distant, the Huberlin place stood in hazed light on two floors, wherein Argus Greene was likely watching his ideas self-perpetuate their energy and their strength to enter the conduits of his brush, his palette and his hand to find their final form on canvas. Several times, she wanted to call him, but the Barnstable directory showed no telephone listing for him; and Greene, if he had a phone, hadn't offered his number to her and so they would remain incommunicado for now, two artists stranded and silent across a gulf of black, rain-swept sand.

On the fourth morning, a scar of blue had split the light-gray clouds into two islands of spent fury. After breakfast, Miss Pennywaite fired up the Phaeton and drove down to the Huberlin Place. Argus Greene's midnight blue Ford van was missing from the driveway. At its entrance, Miss Pennywaite drew the Phaeton to a stop and checked the contents of the rural mailbox set atop a leaning post. It contained magazines, utility bills, junk mail from an array of mail-order houses. Miss Pennywaite judged the total to be more than a single day's delivery.

She drove down the driveway to the house's front porch. Lights still burned on both floors. The house seemed empty. She walked farther down the drive to the rear, mounted the back porch and peered between the curtains partially covering the door glass. She saw no one.

The kitchen stove was free of pans and the sink was clear of dishes.

Miss Pennywaite lingered there a minute listening to the silence. Then she stooped and placed the casserole dish with the thank you note inside on the porch in front of the door. On the drive back home, she passed the blue van headed in the opposite direction. She gave the Phaeton's airhorns a long blast and waved at the young face behind the tinted windshield. Argus Greene waved back and then became a diminishing speck in Miss Pennywaite's rear-view mirror. Well, at least she'd gotten the casserole dish back to him without breaking it and in all due haste where a borrower was concerned.

A half-hour later, as Miss Pennywaite sat ordering a particularly complicated paragraph of her book's second chapter, she heard what was unmistakably Argus Greene's van as it passed by her house, in what sounded to her like a rush. *In a manner of an impeccable manic-depressive*, thought Miss Pennywaite to herself. *A period of unexplainable indolence, followed by an equally curious span of frantic production, a way of life known only to neurotics, psychopaths and true artists!*

It was only scant minutes later that Argus Greene, calling on the telephone from McCauliffe's General Store, was apologizing to Miss Pennywaite for having sped past her so rudely with barely a wave. "I didn't mean to nearly run you off the road, Miss Pennywaite."

"Nonsense, young man. Nobody runs a Duesy off the road, unless it would be another Duesy or a Sherman tank. Tell me, to what do we owe this sudden spate of activity?"

"My paintings," came Greene's voice, fairly swelling with triumph and pride. "I mean, it came as a real shocker. We maverick, cottage-industry painters have never fared well with gallery owners. Our *outré* styles and techniques prevent most of our work from being fast-movers in the marketplace. Owners opt for acceptability over artistic risk. So you can imagine my surprise when not one, but *two* Boston Galleries took a total of ten of my impressionistic seascapes on consignment. Mind you, they're not any of the big Beacon Street galleries. Hell, one's above a Lithuanian restaurant with six tables and the other is on Washington, four doors down from a porn shop. But it's a beginning."

"Recognition begins with slender glimpses," said Miss Pennywaite. "I'm very pleased for you, Mr. Greene."

"Well, I just wanted to let you know where the budding artist has been these past few days. Say, there's somebody else here waiting to use the phone and I've got to load up on a few groceries. When I get the chance, Miss Pennywaite, I'll drop in on you, that's a promise."

"And one to which you will be held, young man," Miss Pennywaite told him and put up the phone.

IN THE WEEK THAT FOLLOWED, Miss Pennywaite paid strict attention to her own business, and that business consisted solely of putting together the initial chapter and full outline of her thirteenth winter book so that her publishers, Camlin and Drame, would be undeniably impressed to the point where they would sit down an illustrator to begin work on her book's jacket cover.

Camlin and Drame was an old and venerable publishing house and, while it had not exactly fallen onto hard times, its old-codger partners tended to miss trends and skimp on promotion and advertising; so correspondingly, Miss Pennywaite never teased them with late chapter submissions or mid-book renegotiations, or any of the dozens of other wily ploys used by bestselling authors who recognized their employers were desperately thin on writers who could pull large sales. She had always held the notion they were all in this together.

In her concentration and diligence, Miss Pennywaite had somehow missed the beginnings of the season's second full-blown storm. Her attention was called to it rudely one afternoon when from the kitchen came the abrupt sound of breaking glass. She stiffened in fear at her typewriter. Isolated as they all were out in no man's land, they offered a great temptation to thieves and intruders. Slowly, trembling just the slightest, Miss Pennywaite drew out the center drawer of her desk, snaked a hand inside and found the grip of the .32-caliber pistol that had been nine years loaded and never fired. Rising with the pistol in her hand, she wondered briefly whether bullets which drew dust could fire.

Her footfalls fell silently upon carpet as she walked slowly across her livingroom, the pistol trained on the doorway leading into the kitchen. No sounds came from the kitchen now. Had the intruder been frightened off at the last moment? Or was he lurking and ready for possible confrontation?

As forcefully as her fear would allow, Miss Pennywaite said, "You in there. I've got a pistol and believe me when I say I am one of those arbitrary persons who shoots first and poses her questions later." She drew a convulsive breath. "Come out of the kitchen with your hands empty and in the air."

Of course, no one was there. Ten minutes of foolish sentry duty told Miss Pennywaite that. A hinge had come loose from a shutter and the flapping shutter had smashed through the window above the sink. Only that. Glass shards were scattered on the floor and in the sink and

the winds carried the rain in through the opening in buckets.

Miss Pennywaite bundled herself up and took a small ladder out into the storm. She removed both shutters and in their place nailed up a slab of plywood large enough to overlap the window frame. Cold air would seek out and find all the hairsbreadth gaps and warps, but it would have to do for now. But she wanted that window replaced before the weather grew more cruel, as it predictably did every year.

After she'd cleaned the kitchen, she wondered if Seth Speers had taken over not only his ailing father's woodcutting business, but his fix-it chores as well. Amos Speers was legendary for his skills at repairing plumbing and wiring and furnaces. Had all those marvelous talents been passed on genetically to his son?

The best place to discover the answer to that question was Edgar McCauliffe's general store. But over the phone Miss Pennywaite learned more than she wanted to hear. Sadly and terribly so.

"You haven't heard, Miss Pennywaite?" McCauliffe's dismal voice inquired. "About Seth?"

"What about Seth, Mr. McCauliffe?"

"Somebody out at South Chatham was searching for driftwood on the beaches day before yesterday and found him."

"Found him?"

"Found his body, I mean," said McCauliffe. "Scouting for driftwood in the middle of a storm like this one. Whole family ought to have their heads examined. Sheriff Donleavy of South Chatham is handling it now."

"What else do you know about it, Mr. McCauliffe?"

"Well, Sheriff Donleavy knows Seth was killed, he knows that all right. Beaten up and then dragged out onto the beach about a quarter-mile east of town. Only the sheriff don't think the boy was killed there, else he would have found Seth's pick-up truck nearby."

"Maybe it was a hitchhiker Seth picked up somewhere," offered Miss Pennywaite. "That could explain the disappearance of the truck."

"All the speculating I'll leave to the likes of yourself, Miss Pennywaite, and Sheriff Donleavy. But I'll speculate on one thing."

"What is that, Mr. McCauliffe?"

"I'd hate to be in his killer's shoes when Amos starts looking for him. His only boy dead. And you know what sort of temper Amos can build up over something like that. If it's some hitchhiker done it like you say, Miss Pennywaite, and he's gone off in Amos' pick-up, then he better be headin' west and he better not stop 'til he gets to Katmandu."



Seth Speers' funeral was a saddening affair made even more dismal by the weather, and the loss of anyone in their small community left a noticeable void that would never really become filled. Miss Pennywaite returned to her book, if somewhat distractedly. Death at the hands of a transient seemed to her to be a particularly lonely and graceless way to die. Life cut short by a stranger's random selection. It was such a terrible, fateful waste.

But Seth Speers' pickup truck wasn't found in some far-flung state at all, but less than a mile inland from the island's rocky southern coast, abandoned at the end of an overgrown logging road near puddle-sized Spider Lake. Two things were known about Seth Speers' killer. He was taller than his victim by two or three inches (both the rear and side-view mirrors of the pickup had been readjusted to accommodate a taller driver) and he smoked Viceroy filter-tip cigarettes (the remnants of two were found in the truck's ashtray, and it was widely known that neither Seth nor his father ever smoked).

CHRISTMAS CAME AND WENT. As in the past twelve years, Miss Pennywaite's agent and publishers re-delivered the hundreds of holiday cards sent to them by her readers so she could in turn thank them each with embossed miniature cards of her own, each depicting the silhouette of an elderly woman seated at a typewriter before an icicle-framed window showcasing a New England winter in all its uncommon beauty. One of Miss Pennywaite's guiding principles all along had been never to let a single reader forget she knew they were out there and buying her books with undaunted faith and undying loyalty.

Throughout these days, Seth Speers' killer remained at large, and unidentified. The Barnstable *Crier* printed no news of the case because there was no news to tell. Likely the matter would remain an unsolved crime down through all the earth's remaining years, as baffling as it had been on the day of its perpetration.

Two days before New Year's Eve, Miss Pennywaite looked up to find her well-stocked pantry almost bereft of food. She had toiled nearly twenty days without a significant break, except to read and answer her Christmas mail. The thirteenth winter book was filling out well now, like a baby that had grown from a scrawny, wailing infant into a chubby human being with substance and life.

Snow was on the wind, but it had not yet materialized. It was a Tuesday when Miss Pennywaite fired up the Phaeton and drove down to the South Harwich General Store, where Edgar McCauliffe greeted



her with all the spirit and wonder of someone witnessing a friend's escape from the grave.

"Well, I'll be salted, kippered and shipped off to Sweden, if it isn't our illustrious Miss Pennywaite! Do you know how long it's been since you've been down here? Why, it's been . . ."

"Eighteen days precisely, Mr. McCauliffe," she informed the giddy proprietor. "And if you're going to treat my occasional visits with such messianic glee, you'll only embarrass me into *total* reclusion. Now, if you will kindly take my shopping list, we can get on with the business of commerce, Mr. McCauliffe."

"Of course, Miss Pennywaite. I didn't mean to gawk and gee-whiz all over the countryside. I'll have this filled and boxed up for you quicker than the proverbial brown fox."

As he scurried back and forth from counters to shelves and back again filling Victoria Pennywaite's order, Edgar McCauliffe kept up a running chatter of political opinion and local gossip passed along without charge. "Now, that Selectman Knott, why there's not a citizen on the whole blasted island trusts him with a borrowed rake, let alone the Barnstable general fund. Know where he and that rabbit-farm family of his spent the holidays? In Nassau, that's where, chalking the whole tab up to some New England Selectmen's Conference or other, what they call a closed session. Which means to any damn fool with half a brain in his head that the whole bamboozling lot of them is conducting some very private shenanigans with a lot of public money."

"I try not to involve myself in local politics, Mr. McCauliffe," said Miss Pennywaite, idly sizing up the quality of a bolt of plaid cloth.

"Which is that scofflaw Knott's philosophy too, it seems. I swear, if folks don't start turning around soon for a good, long look at him, he'll be Massachusetts' junior senator."

"And I'll take six yards of this green plaid, Mr. McCauliffe."

"And the saddest of things about young Seth Speers. Still haven't resigned myself to the fact he's dead, probably never will. Got so used to seeing him come in here every day, doing one thing or another. No need for God to have showed his vengeance that way, against Seth Speers, of all people."

"No, no need at all, Mr. McCauliffe."

The groceries filled three good-sized cardboard boxes to overflowing. Edgar McCauliffe measured out the six yards of cloth, cut it and folded it neatly over a field of boxed canned goods.

"Enough for a regiment here, Miss Pennywaite. But then you've been in the field a goodly length of time, so to speak. Now that artist fella, there's an eater for you."

"Argus Greene."

"He sure don't fit the usual image of the artist as a young man," commented McCauliffe.

"How is that, Mr. McCauliffe?"

"Well, you know how the books and the movies like to show them. All skin and bones and wild-eyed, living in some ghostly flat with no heat and nothing in the kitchen but a big, fat, resident rat trying to cadge a lift out of town. But this Greene fellow ain't nothing destitute about *him*."

"Well, his paintings have been selling pretty well in the Boston galleries," said Miss Pennywaite.

"Eats like the foul King Henry gone without a fork in his hand for a day or two. Cold cereals, milk, meat, eggs enough to make all the local chickens begin to throw fearful looks over their shoulders."

"Mr. McCauliffe, there's nothing in the rule book that demands an artist garretize himself in starvation and poverty while he strives for greatness. You'll pardon me, but I've always found a sanguine attitude, a fire ablaze in the fireplace and plenty of food on the table to be the better accoutrements for success. Now, if you'll have my boxes moved out to the car, Mr. McCauliffe, I'll be on my way."

"Of course, Miss Pennywaite. I didn't mean to chide the young man. Hell, he's much farther along at his work than I was at his age. More power to him, I guess."

"Now, that's the spirit, Mr. McCauliffe. Let's all get fat and sassy and live long, comfortable lives."

"Ever the optimist, aren't you, Miss Pennywaite?"

"And let us not forget true capitalist," said Miss Pennywaite.

"Now come alone, Mr. McCauliffe and let's get me loaded up and on my way."

THE PASSING OF ANOTHER WEEK'S WORK found Miss Pennywaite at last confronting the crucial final chapter of her thirteenth winter novel. This phase was always the most tense and anxious time for her. A properly good and entertaining thriller was like the construction of a house. You provided it with a sturdy foundation, gave it a strong frame and expertly crafted floors, ceilings and walls, and then topped it off with a roof that leaked rain and wind, and roofbeams set to collapse under the slightest pressure. No, this was not at all the time to grow over-confident or careless. Ideas and book characters possessed their own energies, their own forward momentum; the successful writers were really nothing more than good listeners

and thence accurate recorders of thoughts, actions and events.

To prepare for those final five-thousand words, Victoria Pennywaite duly covered the ground that had already been prepared. However, she did not re-read the way most writers did, tediously moving from page to page, scribbling notes and additions and extractions in every available inch of blank, unused space. No, that was not her way to go about it at all.

For, although not a single living soul besides herself knew it, Miss Pennywaite was blessed and at times cursed with a photographic memory and total recall. Her maternal grandmother, whose husband had been a whaler, had recorded a family diary, a massive book covered in whaleskin and done with a quill pen in nearly calligraphical perfection. Its entries all bore the day, month and year of their commemoration to family history and the curious thing of it was that often weeks and months would pass between entries and yet the sweep of her grandmother's memory was astounding and meticulous as her hand filled in the blanks of days as though it had been recording continuously, through all of her days, without relief.

The gift had been passed to Victoria's mother, who consistently and without error, corrected her husband's memory of names, dates, and events. Victoria's father, upon one such occasion at having had his memory refreshed, had confided privately to Victoria of his suspicion that she had in her brain, a tiny room filled with miniature books into which her mother's concentration would crawl to pull down just the volume she needed when some point of remembrance was being contended.

And so, bound incontrovertibly by the laws of genetics, that amazing ability to store and recall the past had been transferred from grandmother to mother to daughter, like a birthmark whose shape and size remained unchanged through countless generations.

Settled before the livingroom fireplace, staring at a chunk of cedar giving off a bath of warmth on that chilly midmorning, Miss Pennywaite sipped at a cup of tea and began to "read" the first and only draft of her thirteenth winter book. Its pages in another room, she began to throw them up upon a wall of her brain one by one, like sheets of microfilm retrieved from that genetic chamber and cast on the screen of her mind, an act of concentration no tougher for her than if she were seated in a moviehouse watching a film.

Lost in her work, she shunted aside time as a thing without properties and without consequence. Miss Pennywaite held her eyes closed lightly in the manner of someone momentarily forgetting a

name or a place, as she sat within the rock-hard walls of her own skull while her projectionist brain presented the slides of her work. Almost unconsciously, she made a mental note here, a correction there; exchanged one metaphor for another; deepened or embellished this bit of dialogue or that, never fearful that any of it could not again be bid up at will, that the machine of her peculiar brain would wear out or break down from constant use.

When she was at last shown the final page of the next-to-last chapter, the gray light of day still lightened the room. Miss Pennywaite brought her hands to her eyes and massaged her drawn lids like a child just come from a Saturday afternoon matinee out into harsh sunlight. She glanced down at her wristwatch. Since the first page had flashed up in her mind, a little over two hours had passed. That was a better than average time for a reading and as a barometer, it told her she had an idea which captured and held interest and read quickly.

All the significant changes committed to memory, Miss Pennywaite rose to toss another cedar split into the fading fire when her mind, a mind of its own really and not beholding one iota to its owner, suddenly called up a bit of memory from its storehouse. *You must let me see some of the chapters of your new book once you have it underway*, came the entreating words of Argus Greene. Miss Pennywaite admitted that on far-flung Barstable, honest, qualified, critical opinion was hard to come by. She went to the dining room and sorted out the first three chapters, slipped them into a manila folder, put on a coat and went out to the Duesenberg, while in its enforced idleness, took its own sweet time in firing up.

It was a dry day, but cold. Mercifully, the island had been without a drop of rain in over two days. On the eastern horizon, groups of black clouds were closing ranks out at sea, a reminder to the islanders that their escape from foul weather was fated always to be temporary.

Argus Greene's midnight blue van was parked down the driveway of the Huberlin place. Miss Pennywaite drew the Phaeton to a stop behind it. She disembarked gingerly. The earthen driveway was a partly-frozen quagmire, not yet entirely certain if it wanted its travelers to sink or slip. As she walked, Miss Pennywaite kept her eyes glued to the ground as she took tiny dance steps to avoid potholes and ruts. It proved to be an unnecessarily treacherous trip. Argus Greene wasn't home. Or he was frenetically flying paint across a canvas upstairs and either couldn't or wouldn't hear Miss Pennywaite's ringing of the doorbell and raps upon his door.

For a moment she considered leaving the book chapters propped up

against the door, but one quick glance up to survey the movement of the storm clouds told her they were sweeping down upon the island with good speed. And so she tucked them back under her arm and retraced her steps to the Phaeton. She backed it out cautiously, the rear view mirror showing her only a pillbox slot of rear windowglass. And although it might have been her hyperactive imagination or the quirk of reflected light, she thought she saw as she swung onto the roadway, the face of a man framed in a cramped circular window on the house's second floor, looking out at her.

**THE FULL BRUNT OF THE OCEAN STORM STRUCK BARNSTABLE** a little after dusk that evening, beginning at once to deal Miss Pennywaite's home a vicious cuffing. Shutters throughout the house rattled like death had come knocking and with a hundred fists was searching for a way to come in. The branches of trees whipped themselves without mercy and there wasn't a window that could literally be seen out of. Throughout the battering, Miss Pennywaite worked away at her book's last chapter, safe in an oblivious vacuum, shuttled out of harm's way on the wings of human thought. In one four-hour stretch, she rose and left her work only twice: once to brew fresh tea to put beneath the candle warmer and once to build the fire.

When finally she pushed back in exhausted retreat from her make-believe world, it was nearly nine p.m. But it was a warm, satisfying exhaustion, the kind a human being felt after he or she faced a hard task, had done it well and had prevailed.

At any other time, present conditions would have been more than ample to cause Miss Pennywaite to fall asleep the instant her head hit the pillow. Safe and secure in a warm house beyond the clutches of the storm; a full and active day begun very early; an arduous but successful session with her book. But these factors failed to come together. They kept their wary distance, their eyes cast upon another intruder tugging at Miss Pennywaite's brain as she lay fully awake in bed, as the storm howled in the night.

She was thinking of her visit to the Huberlin place earlier in the day. The face in the upstairs window was still lodged in the back of her mind, in all its inscrutability. But there was something else she had seen and that something seemed to be telling her it was a vital piece in some emerging puzzle she would very soon find herself unraveling. But whatever it was, the puzzle bit was hiding like some wily forest animal, caught in the midst of being both the pursuer and the prey.

Trying to force the memory into the open made Miss Pennywaite's

temples throb. She was thinking too hard, pressing. She fixed her gaze upon the black void of the bedroom ceiling, allowing herself to become drawn up into its depths as though it were some massive mouth hungering for food, forcing nothing, not directing her mind in any direction but up into the sphere of blackness and its hunger.

And slowly, very slowly, the surrender worked its magic until the bit of puzzle, unbidden, floated to the surface of her mind like some deadened weight grasped in the hold of a floatation device. She had been judging the ground then, as she walked up the rutted, potholed driveway of the Huberlin place, being ever so careful not to tumble and break a brittle bone in the cold. And her eyes and brain had registered something on the ground as it passed beneath her feet. She waited, waited — letting her infallible memory search out its myriad of tiny storage compartments. And then it was being served up as effortlessly as a butler's serving up an entree after the fruit cup appetizer.

Sawdust.

There had been collections of sawdust trapped beneath thin sheets of ice in the ruts and potholes of the driveway. Into her mind flew a vision of Amos Speers' ramshackle pick-up truck, in the nooks and crannies of its tail gate the lodgings of years of sawdust granules from Speers' cedar cuttings, that truck now aging inheritance of Seth Speers, who without any doubt had driven it recently down the deteriorated driveway of the Huberlin place. And now Seth Speers was dead, murdered by a man who was taller than his victim. In her mind, Miss Pennywaite stood Seth Speers alongside Argus Greene to compare their heights. Her heart gave a jump. Argus Greene was taller by at least three inches.

She was now, she knew, driving somewhat recklessly into the dangerous territory of supposition. But not so dangerous really, because she did it constantly with her fictional characters. Suppose this character did this, what if that character did the other? Her heart leaped again. Suppose . . . just suppose . . . Argus Greene had killed Seth Speers. There it was: out in the open, uttered. The bedroom's darkness all at once seemed to shrink its volume of space. Her body felt frigidly cold and yet her forehead prickled with hot perspiration. Her heart rate was soaring.

She tossed off her bedcovers, rose, put on her robe and slippers and went into the livingroom. The fire was a shimmer of red embers. Miss Pennywaite sought out dry splits of cedar and placed them on the coals carefully, where they began after a moment to crackle to life. Then she pulled the Queen Anne rocker to the fire's brink so her chilled body could capture most of its warmth and began to think about Argus

Greene in terms of being a murderer.

Well, it was a preposterous notion, was it not? Argus Greene — a cordial, articulate, unaggressive young artist — a cold, calculating murderer. And then her mind began to assemble a kind of grocery list of who murdered: shy computer company employees who one day out of the calm blue began spraying offices with bullets; quiet college boys, described by their fellows as polite and nice, who at the heights of their quiet despair suddenly went on insane sprees of rifle-sniping at students as they strolled campus grounds; people who petted dogs and liked children; people who wouldn't harm flies; people in general; anybody, anytime, anyplace.

The shadows dancing erratically off the livingroom walls were diminishing to midgets as the fire faded once more. Miss Pennywaite seemed sapped of every last ounce of strength, and she could not recall when a notion or problem had kept her up this late; she knew the extra waking hours would reap its small havoc on her system.

She found her way back to the bedroom. She could feel her heart moving in fitful exhaustion on her frail chest. She fell into bed with something of the manner of an old building being toppled. Argus Greene, a murderer. It was a possibility; not a certainty yet, but a growing possibility all the same. Still and all, a stranger to her, in the morning she would begin to fill in the blanks of his life.

AT TEN A.M. THE NEXT MORNING, beneath the fringes of yet another westward-moving storm, Miss Pennywaite headed the Duesenberg for Boston.

At Plymouth Bay, steering precariously with a single hand, she unwrapped a sandwich of herring and cream cheese while her mind fed back Argus Greene's words. *My paintings . . . two Boston galleries took a total of ten of my impressionistic seascapes on consignment. One's above a Lithuanian restaurant . . . and the other is on Washington, four doors down from a porn shop.* What else had he said that would have to stand the test of verification? *I got in the tail-end of Vietnam.* And he had mentioned his aborted matriculation at . . . where had he said? Yes. At Boston University. *A brief sojourn* was the way Argus Greene had tersely put it. And wasn't there also something Seth Speers had heard from the mouth of Argus Greene? Miss Pennywaite took another bite of sandwich, spun through another curve in the highway and waited with prim patience for the bit of data to be dredged up. *The artist. Got rich folks living in Lawrence.*

Shortly after noon, Victoria Pennywaite was viewing the Charles



River against the grayish, serious-looking backdrop of Cambridge and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A lone oarsman skulled up the river in a single-man shell, the bleak and dismal day allowing him the entire avenue to himself. Snow would be falling before too long.

Near the Boston Common Gardens, Miss Pennywaite pulled to the curb and walked to a public phone booth. The directory listed twenty-six art galleries in the Greater Boston area. Reaching them all in turn by car would take hours, so she was left with the single alternative of letting her fingers do the walking. She left the booth and crossed Commonwealth Avenue and in two separate drugstores got two hefty fistsful of small change and then went into a delicatessen for a third fistful for good measure. She felt like a pinball addict let loose on a boulevard of nothing but penny arcades.

She returned to the phone booth, re-opened the directory to the art gallery listings, took out a ballpoint pen and made a small, neat mountain of coins on the metal tabletop. Then, she drew a deep breath to steel herself against the tedium she was about to bear, made a checkmark next to Androlenus Galleries in the directory, fed the telephone and dialed.

Through the list of twenty-six galleries, Miss Pennywaite remained cordial and brief, asking but two questions, thanking the gallery representatives for their cooperation and then moving swiftly onto the next.

When Xavier Fine Art was at last checked off, Miss Pennywaite placed a call to the Boston Public Library, and from a Quick-Information clerk learned that five new galleries had sprung up in the Boston area since the current year's telephone directory had been issued. These, too, Miss Pennywaite called as her mountain of small change drew down to a molehill of a few nickels and dimes.

And then it was over, every art gallery in the city dutifully called and queried, as another blank in the life of the stranger in the Huberlin place became filled. Unanimously, not a single gallery was situated near a pornographic shop or above a Lithuanian restaurant. And not a single gallery had ever exhibited or purchased on consignment any works by an artist named Argus Greene.

Miss Pennywaite was only a few blocks from Boston University, and a proximate opportunity to fill in another blank. Argus Greene had endured a *brief sojourn* there. Or had he?

An hour later, after a long, impatient wait at the Registrar's Office, the falseness of that statement surfaced to be added to the others. No student named Argus Greene had ever matriculated at Boston University, for any length of time.



IT CHILLED HER A LITTLE NOW as she came around to the realization that Argus Greene was nearly nothing he professed. His life, at least since the time he came to Barnstable and took over the Huberlin place, was a series of lies and deceptions. But was there calculation to them? Did the lies represent elements in some darker design?

Miss Pennywaite had one more stop to make in the Boston area, one more blank to fill. From Boston she drove north, hugging the coastline until she arrived at the northern boundary of Suffolk County. Then she swung to the northwest, inland towards the New Hampshire border where on its lip lay the town of Lawrence. *The artist, came Seth Speers' word again. Got rich folks living in Lawrence.* Was she on the verge of encountering yet another lie?

The Lawrence telephone directory showed but a single Greene embellished with the superfluous "e" dangling on the end: *Greene, Philip and Ardele, 221 Rose Street.*

Rose Street blossomed with no rose bushes. It was a street of factory homes pinched together like the row houses in the industrial sections of Pittsburgh and Cleveland, A street of abandoned hopes and dreams, cast in the sad and brooding shadows of shoe factories and foundries and the smoke stacks of manufacturing plants.

The house at 221 Rose Street was tinted gray like all the others. One window shutter hung precariously from a single hinge. All the shades were drawn fully down, even though the afternoon sun shone from an opposite direction.

The man in his fifties who answered the door wore rumpled trousers and a faded pajamatop. A rush of stale food and mustiness fell out the door and into Miss Pennywaite's nostrils. The expression on Philip Greene's face showed disturbance and weariness, as to say he wanted no more intrusions in his life, wanted simply to collect his mail from the mailbox and his newspaper from the stoop and to go to and from the grocery store without any human encounters beyond the one with the check-out clerk.

"Excuse me, Mr. Greene," said Miss Pennywaite, carefully, "but are you the father of Argus Greene?"

"Argus? Yes, I'm his father. What is it?"

"I'm Miss Penny, Mr. Greene. Argus was one of my high school English students, one of my better students I might add. I found myself in the neighborhood just now, thought about Argus and decided to drop by and take my chances that he would be at home. May I come in, Mr. Greene?"

She could read the immediate retreat in his defensive eyes, as

though all his pasts had been buried and now here was someone coming along with a shovel to open their graves.

"Argus, he isn't here. I mean, he doesn't live at home anymore."

"May . . . may I come inside for a moment, Mr. Greene?"

The tired eyes reflected, winced. "Really, Mrs. Penny, I don't see what good can come from it."

"Please."

"Well, for a minute, I guess. Well, come in, come in."

The Greene livingroom was dimly lit and hadn't had an airing in years. The old, overstuffed furniture seemed to sit around like immobile baby elephants waiting to die. The mantel was overloaded with photographs in small frames. Miss Pennywaite walked over to them immediately without seeming too preoccupied to certify that Argus Greene had become trapped in yet another falsehood. Yes, there was the face of the young man who now lived in the Huberlin place. There was a photograph of him standing defiantly next to a souped-up automobile that was parked in front of the house Miss Pennywaite had just entered. And another of him in his cap and gown of his high school graduation. And a third depicting him in the dress uniform of an Army private. Oddly, there were no photos of him standing in the company of his mother or father, or with his sisters, of which there seemed to be two, both older.

"Yes," said Miss Pennywaite, "that's Argus. He was such a fine student of English. He had a flair for it, a knack, a gift."

"Yeh. Well, Miss Penny, he had plenty of other gifts, too, let me tell you."

"What gifts, Mr. Greene?"

A preposterous laugh erupted and seemed to sweep the room like a thing with legs. "Where you want me to start? Huhn? He had a gift for beefing with his foremen and supers every job he ever had. The shoe factory, the chemical works, the milk company, A fighter, that one. Only he picks his fights with all the wrong crowd, all the people who could retaliate by throwing him out on his butt."

"I see Argus has sisters," said Miss Pennywaite, trying to quell her discomfort.

"The two bright spots in my life at the present. Catherine lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey, two sons. Her husband's a metals analyst with a can company. Good future. Amy just got divorced, but he wasn't such a bad guy. It just didn't work out. Now, she's taking secretarial training. I told her not to shoot for no moon until she gets her feet back under her again. She works in Boston, comes over once in a while. All my kids have gone their separate ways now, but that's the way it's

got to be, I guess."

"And your wife?"

The eyes winced again. But it seemed to Miss Pennywaite special and deeper.

"Ardele died about four years ago. Car hit her over on Stander Street. Icy. Sleet come down all over the place. And she had a sack of groceries hiked up so she couldn't see so good. Guy never stopped and the cops never caught him. I hope to hell the guy's sitting alone in some rat-infested hotel someplace with a case of the plague and not a dime to call his own. What's done is done. She hung in there three or four days after she got hit. Always a battler, Ardele was. Hanging in caused her more pain this time than she shoulda had to take."

"I learned from somewhere that Argus was in Vietnam," said Miss Pennywaite, quickly moving to what she thought would be a softer topic. But it was pretty much like leaping out of the clutches of a grizzly bear and into a pit of vipers.

"Huhn. I'll tell you, Miss Penny, he wasn't exactly standing up front and jumping up and down begging to be taken," said Philip Greene. "He robbed old man Carruthers grocery over on Vought Street. That was in '65. Strongarm stuff. Haven't been able to look Mel Carruthers in the eye since. Anyway, the kid bungled it and got nabbed. The judge gave him a choice. Ten years in the slam, or join the Army."

"They threw him into a helicopter, on a fire-fight team. He wasn't in the Mekong Delta two months when they flew in on a Cong position near Can Tho under jet air cover. The kid was crouched just behind the door gunner as they moved down on the position. And then, what do you think? The 'copter gets about fifty feet from the ground and the kid jumps. He jumps."

"And he wasn't supposed to jump?"

Philip Greene tried to stifle a wry smile. "He broke both ankles and a knee cap. At the inquiry, he claimed he was pushed out the door. It wouldn't wash. The door gunner was in *front of him*, for God's sake and the rest of the fire team was at least three feet away. He got six months in the stockade and a general discharge under what they call honorable conditions. That means they didn't have enough on him to court-martial his butt, but that they didn't want him in the Army anymore screwing everything up and putting the lives of the other guys in danger. When I heard about it, I put all this things in storage across town, wrote to him and told him where his stuff was and that I didn't want to see him again. And I kept my word on that these past thirteen

years. I don't know where he is now and frankly, I'm not interested. Oh, I keep his photos on the mantel and all, because I'm a sentimental old bastard at heart. But Argus is something less than my son now."

**MISS PENNYWAITE HAD JUST TWO MORE STOPS TO MAKE** now before she returned to Barnstable, stops which had to do with the three-day period Argus Greene told her had been spent in Boston selling his nonexistent paintings to fictitious art galleries. She'd made a note of the days he was gone. Argus Greene had left for Boston on the morning of the 16th and had returned on the morning of the 18th when Miss Pennywaite had passed him on the highway on her way back from the Huberlin place — thirty-six hours during which his actions and whereabouts were not convincingly accounted for. As improbable as it seemed, had there taken place in the Boston area some significant act in which Argus Greene had been centrally involved?

Though her two stops might prove fruitless, Miss Pennywaite had pursued notions down dead alleys before and had come out of them none the worse for the trips. And so dutifully, she drove to both the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Herald-American* and in their circulation departments purchased copies of each paper for the three days in question, tucked them beneath her arm without bothering to scan them and promptly popped back into the Duesenberg and turned it back in the direction of Barnstable.

And as she drove back down the coastline, satisfied with her investigations of Argus Greene on every count, there remained inside her an uneasiness that had taken root in her from the time she'd reached the outskirts of Boston. It had been there when she'd walked across Commonwealth Avenue for telephone change, had been there while she'd telephoned, had been there on the drive to Lawrence and back, had been there during her final stops at the two newspaper offices in Boston . . . and was there inside her now. She didn't know how many blue vans her eyes had glimpsed, more than one she was certain. The queer uneasiness in her was now identified, though. And that uneasiness told her that at nearly every step and every stop and every turn, it was not misplaced suspicion for her to suspect she had been followed. And when, at a little after eight p.m., she reached Barnstable and drove past the Huberlin place and picked out the shadowy form of Argus Greene's van parked in the driveway, she quelled an overwhelming desire to stop on the roadway, stalk up on it in the darkness and place a palm on the steel hood concealing its

engine to learn if it was warm. She motored straight on, with just a slide of her eyeballs, parked in her own driveway and hurried into her own house.

She made a fire and then fell to a page-by-page examination of the thick stack of newspapers. Every local article, however brief or seemingly insignificant, came before her careful scrutiny. She was seeking some crime or other, some hint of criminal activity however vague in which Argus Greene might have been involved.

There was a significant front-page news story carried on the 17th by both daily papers under the headline SON OF INVESTMENT BANKER VANISHES. Miss Pennywaite read the story attentively, but holding it not to be significant:

*BROOKLINE — (AP) — The son of a wealthy investment banker vanished on his way to school in this small, residential community west of Boston. The eight-year-old boy is the son of Leland Vada, prominent Brookline investment banker. Richard Vada was enrolled in special enrichment courses at Hilliard Academy, a private school located eight blocks from the Vada residence. Police are retracing Vada's route to school in search of evidence in connection with his disappearance and are questioning residents along the route in hopes of uncovering an eye-witness. Abduction has not yet been ruled out, said a spokesman for the Brookline Police Department.*

The papers held other events to be considered — robberies, arsons, burglaries — all happening within the time frame of Argus Greene's leave from Barnstable. Miss Pennywaite's mind poured over them all, moving at a pace deliberate enough for it to absorb it all. But always it kept leaping back to the Vada disappearance, demanding a re-examination. Could Argus Greene have been involved in a daring daylight kidnapping for profit? And further — and far more dangerous — was he now harboring the eight-year-old Vada boy in the Huberlin place, cruelly biding his time until the parents of Richard Vada, numbed and terrified by the loss of their son, would be willing to accede to nearly any demand?

The thought shook her so badly her hands began to tremble uncontrollably and had to put each in the hard grip of the other in order to stop it. Argus Greene an abductor? It was possible. God, it was *entirely* possible.

The trembling quieted slightly. Firm resolve was taking the place of her fear. Sheriff Donleavy had to be called. Miss Pennywaite got up and went into the kitchen where on a wall next to a pale yellow wall phone a small blackboard held in chalk all the important and emergency phone numbers she needed to make her way safely and securely through these isolated winters. Her eye found the one for the sheriff's office and she dialed, but the line was busy. She broke the connection and dialed again, but the results were the same.

And then, as she was about to dial again, her memory began to rumble awake once more like some dark, slumbering animal shaking itself from sleep at the back of a dank cave. She waited breathless for the memory to take shape, knowing instinctively it would have frightful bearing on the present situation. The memory came to her in the form of something Edgar McCaullife had said to her the day she'd first arrived at Barnstable and had stopped at South Harwich General Store to buy her first winter necessities. *Now that artist fella, there's an eater for you. Cold cereals, milk, meat, eggs enough to make all the local chickens begin to throw fearful looks over their shoulders.*

Well, of course he bought like the commodities officer for the Sixth U.S. Army Corps. He was stocking up his pantry for two, with no certain idea of how long his hostage would have to be accommodated.

EDGAR MCCAULLIFE KEPT HIS STORE OPEN until nine p.m. and it was just a few minutes short of that now. Quickly, Miss Pennywaite found the number for the general store on blackboard and dialed it. On the fourth buzz a male voice answered.

"South Harwich General Store, Edgar McCaullife speaking."

"Edgar, this is Victoria Pennywaite."

"Yes, Miss Pennywaite. Sorry, but I'm afraid I can't make any deliveries tonight. Truck's busted. Axle. Snapped like a chicken's leg about two this afternoon."

"It isn't a delivery I'm calling about, Edgar," said Miss Pennywaite with some urgency in her tone so she might gain this old man's undivided attention on a matter that could spell someone's life or death.

"It isn't?"

"No. I'm calling about Argus Greene, the young man who's taken the Huberlin place."

"What about him, Miss Pennywaite?" asked McCaullife.

"A while back, you mentioned how Mr. Greene was a voluminous gastronomus."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Pennywaite?"

"You said he ate a lot. In fact, seemingly *too much* for a person of his slender stature."

"Why, yes, Miss Pennywaite. A thing to remark upon, yes, as I did at the time. But your artist-types, you never know what sort of physical frenzy they get worked into and the like. *Did* seem to me, though, to be a powerful lot of food buying for somebody who lives alone."

"And to me as well, Mr. McCaullife."

"And it took up all of a sudden, too, as I recollect."

"What?"

"Yes, Ma'am. A couple of weeks before you arrived on the island. One day he's eatin' just normal. And then, I'm puttin' up these large orders for him."

Miss Pennywaite closed her eyes softly. She got the picture. And there was another picture she was getting as well, one of the evidence found by the sheriff's department at Spider Lake where the body of Seth Speers had been found — the remains of two Viceroy cigarettes found in the ashtray of the pick-up truck, thoughtless discards by Seth Speer's murderer.

"Mr. McCaullife . . ."

"Yes, Miss Pennywaite?"

"Does Argus Greene smoke? Smoke cigarettes, I mean?"

"Why, yes, I believe he does, Ma'am?"

"Do you recall the brand?"

"I do indeed, Miss Pennywaite, out of the fact I had to order Mr. Greene three cartons special, what with there not being many islanders who call for that brand."

"And what is that brand, Mr. McCaullife?"

Edgar McCaullife was about to speak across the line when his voice fell suddenly silent, cut off as abruptly as if it had been snipped with a pair of scissors.

"Mr. McCaullife?" spoke Victoria Pennywaite into the receiver, sharply. "The brand, Mr. McCaullife, the brand!"

Somehow they had become disconnected. Miss Pennywaite was speaking into a dead phone. The weather could have done that, knocked down a line somewhere. Rain was splattering off the kitchen window above the sink in the darkness and rural New England was notorious for faulty telecommunications.

Miss Pennywaite broke the connection and then broke it again, but it was no use. She wasn't even getting a dial tone. She supposed she could drive to the sheriff's office. Chatham was only twelve miles to the

east out on the lip of the island and it was still early enough for her to expect someone to be there.

She put up the phone and went back into the livingroom for a coat, a scarf and a pair of gloves. She was putting on the coat when it swept in upon her, a wave of cold, icy air. Somewhere . . . somewhere in the house . . . a window or door had been opened.

A breath of air caught in her throat and remained locked there, like an air bubble trapped in a volume of water. The rush of cold air dissolved. Someone had entered her house through the kitchen door and now it was closed behind him. There was no doubt in her mind who her intruder was, just as there was no uncertainty that her telephone line had been cut. It was Argus Greene and he'd come to pay his final respects to a meddling old mystery writer who'd meddled once too often in the private lives of others. And who for that meddling would perhaps now pay the supreme penalty.

WHEN HE MATERIALIZED IN THE KITCHEN DOORWAY, rain-water dripping from the hood of his slicker, the sight of him was more an affirmation of her suspicions than it was shock or terror. His eyes seemed calm. The pistol trained on Miss Pennywaite's chest was steady in his grip.

"Did you cut my telephone line, Mr. Greene?" said Miss Pennywaite evenly.

His smile was smug, as though he'd done an act of which he was extremely proud. "I did, Miss Pennywaite."

"I see." Miss Pennywaite felt her eyeballs slide in the direction of the dining room. The pistol was in the center drawer of her desk, a million miles away. "And you have the boy, don't you. The Vada boy."

"You shouldn't have come snooping around, Miss Pennywaite," Greene told her. "I saw you from the upstairs window that afternoon. I could have kept you out of this, you know. But you raised my suspicions with your fascination in my driveway. You had me puzzled, Miss Pennywaite, I must admit. What's in a driveway, I asked myself. Had you dropped something? Were you checking for patches of ice so you wouldn't slip and fall? After you were gone I went out and checked the driveway myself. Of course. Sawdust. From the tailgate of Seth Speers' truck, bounced loose in the ruts."

Miss Pennywaite found it terribly difficult to breathe normally. Her lungs heaved in fits and starts, like a set of faulty bellows.

"So you knew Seth Speers had been to the Huberlin place just before his death," Argus Greene went on. "Meddling, snooping. Just like



you, Miss Agatha Detective."

"Seth Speers stumbled onto the fact you had the Vada boy," said Miss Pennywaite, weakly. "You killed him and drove his body in the pick-up truck out to Spider Lake. You propped him behind the wheel to make it look as though he'd been murdered by some transient hitchhiker. But you failed to readjust the seat and re-position the mirrors. And you left two spent cigarettes in the truck's ashtray."

"Minor blunders, Miss Pennywaite. No, you're the only element threatening my plan now."

"You followed me to Boston, as well."

"Your phone calls from that booth near the Boston Common, yes. You were calling galleries to confirm the existence of my paintings. And then the college, to learn whether I'd ever been a student there. You even drove to Lawrence to talk to my old man. I'm sure that was a charming get-together."

"If you're going to represent yourself as an enigma," said Miss Pennywaite, "sooner or later, people are going to seek out the truth."

"My father probably trotted out the old litany of my succession of failures. From a guy who spent thirty years at the same shelter, in front of the same furnace, doing the same job. From a guy whose life-long hobbies include beer, bowling and shouting obscenities at his family and the neighborhood in general."

Miss Pennywaite bit into her lower lip. "Mr. Greene, no parent has the moral or ethical right to harbor expectations for his children higher than his own achievements."

"Well, this little caper will set me up very nicely for the rest of my life," said Argus Greene. "Another couple of weeks and this Vada guy will submit to nearly any monetary demand to get his brat kid back."

"You could return him to his parents now," said Miss Pennywaite. "I'm sure the law will take an act of volunteerism like that into account."

"And they're going to wipe Seth Speers killing off the books, too, I suppose? No, Miss Pennywaite, when you're sitting on a gold mine, you don't blow it up."

"You're going to . . . kill me, too."

A trace of a smile worked across Argus Greene's lips, lifting completely now the last veil obscuring the pure psychotic. "Yes, Miss Pennywaite. I'm afraid it has to be that way. We'll go back to my place. It wouldn't do to have any blood here, any evidence of violence. Of course, if you resist, I'll have no choice. Now, if you'll finish putting on your coat, Miss Pennywaite, we'll be off . . ."

THE RAINS WERE STILL PELTING DOWN OUTSIDE. No one would hear a pistol shot through the wall of its pounding. How much longer had she left to live? Fifteen minutes? Twenty? Thirty?

Argus Greene's psychotic grin broadened slightly from across the room. "You know, Miss Pennywaite, the events of these last few weeks would have made a great little thriller for you. Think of it. The busy-body dowager novelist stalking the wily kidnapper . . ."

"Kidnapper and killer," corrected Miss Pennywaite.

" . . . the twists and turns in the trail, the uncovering of vital clues, the unmasking and then . . . the confrontation. *The Man in the Huberlin Place*. Excellent title, don't you think? Alas, it's a book that won't be written." His eyes hardened. "Let's go, Miss Pennywaite. It's getting late."

Tears began to build in her eyes. She was about to die. There was so much left to do and she was going to die. She glanced at her desk and saw the drafts of her winter book. Her obituary would be a major disappointment. *Miss Victoria Pennywaite died with a work in progress* . . . A legacy the heir to her estate, in this case her publishers, would assign to some anonymous ghostwriter to hack out and hustle out to the marketplace for some hefty posthumous sales, a hundred thousand cash registers ringing a dance on her coffin.

Whether it was rage, indignance or fear which clouded her reason, Miss Pennywaite wasn't completely certain. All she could recall of the moment was that she was not about to die merely because someone was willing it. She had only one arm sleeved in her heavy, woolen coat, the rest of it draped at her right side. All at once in a storm of rage or temporary insanity she raised the coat in front of her at arm's length and positioned a bit to her right side. And then, with all her courage and strength, she charged Argus Greene, bellowing an Apache battle charge she'd learned from someone on a visit to an archaeological dig in the Rio Grande basin.

Argus Greene fired his pistol three times and each time the coat billowed against her body as it was struck. Miraculously the first two bullets missed her entirely, how closely she could not tell. The third caused her right side to sear with a bright pain just above her waist, but she kept up her charge and the ridiculously unintimidating Apache scream until she felt herself crash head-long into Greene, sending them both tumbling to the door in a tangle of arms and legs and the bulky woolen coat.

Argus Greene appeared to have hit his head as he fell. He was partially unconscious. Miss Pennywaite groped for his pistol but it was irretrievably lost in the folds of the coat. But she was alive and more

mobile than was Argus Greene at this moment and so she was grateful for slender favors.

She struggled to her feet, even as Greene was returning to his senses. Her car keys were in her purse, which was in the livingroom sixty feet away. But there was a spare key in a magnetized box beneath the dashboard of the Duesenberg. But even as Miss Pennywaite ran for the kitchen and broke through the back door to the service porch, she sensed her escape plan was tragically flawed. And she saw that flaw now as she glanced through the rain-streaked side window of the service porch. Argus Greene had drawn his van up behind her car, blocking her completely!

She could hear Argus Greene getting to his feet, swearing at her viciously, insanely. Miss Pennywaite clambered down the back steps and down the narrow walk along the rear of the house, the driven rain throwing a wall of resistance in her face. Where could she go? How far and for how long could she run at her age?

She reached the driveway running and put out a hand to slow her pace. Her fingers caught on a corner of the pile of cedar splits, but the ground was a quagmire beneath her feet. The slope of a narrow side-hill was too great for her to regain her balance and all at once her feet left the muddy ground. She fell on her tailbone. Had it been summer-time and the earth hardpacked, her spine would have snapped like a dry and brittle branch.

She reached out frantically and got a handhold again. Her fingers wrapped around a shank of cold steel as she heard Argus Greene, pounding down the stairs and shrieking obscenities into the night. A voice echoed in her mind then, another bit of memory pushing through to her consciousness. It was the voice of Seth Speers, the words of a dead man, trying to reach her. *About those steel anchoring pegs . . . top soil is going to get washed away . . . first couple of storms can loosen them real easy.*

The bulk of a human form flashed in the corner of her eyes as the anchoring peg in Miss Pennywaite's right hand freed itself from the earth and mud. For a split instant Argus Greene loomed above her, his darkly hooded eye brows dripping rainwater, and his eyes flashing with madness. And then he was losing his balance, just as Miss Pennywaite had done, his arms windmilling in the air in a comic attempt to remain on his feet. And then he was falling, his shadowy form filling Miss Pennywaite's eyes as she brought her hands and arms up in front of her body to cushion the impact. When their bodies met, Argus Greene let out another chilling scream, but this one was not a scream

of insanity. It was a scream of pain.

When Miss Pennywaite finally rolled the dead weight of him from atop her, Argus Greene was unconscious. Blood came from a circular wound in his right side. Miss Pennywaite spent a minute on the ground regaining her composure and her strength. She found the keys to Argus Greene's van in a pocket of his jeans. She'd never driven one of these contraptions of youth, but it was clear now that she was going to have to learn.

Argus Greene was tall but not a heavyweight at all, but getting him into the rear of the van was still a struggle. She found handcuffs, manacles, lengths of rope and rolls of adhesive tape. She tried to keep her mind from considering the purposes for which they had been used.

She employed the set of handcuffs to shackle Argus Greene to the steel framing of the van. He was semi-conscious now and with his midsection wrapped tightly with gauze, would lose no more blood until Miss Pennywaite could get him to the emergency clinic in Chatham. And she could tell he was not strong enough to pose a threat on the trip.

The van turned out to have an automatic shift and not a complicated machine to manage. It moved easily along the highway east the thirty miles to Chatham, through the dark night. Just now, she did not want to dwell on Argus Greene and whether his dark escapades would become the grist for Miss Pennywaite's fourteenth winter book. The ugliness and danger of it all was still too close at hand for her to entertain any such notions.

THREE WEEKS LATER, AFTER ARGUS GREENE'S RECOVERY and arrest on charges of kidnapping and murder, the idea of the book was no closer to a commitment in her mind. Sheriff Donleavy called her to fill Miss Pennywaite in on all of these matters.

There was, of course, one remaining blank spot to be filled and nearing the close of their conversation, Miss Pennywaite posed to Sheriff Donleavy the final question.

Her query dealt with the possessions taken from Argus Greene's personal at the time of his arrest, particularly the package of cigarettes he might have been carrying.

Sheriff Donleavy took a minute to check his personal property receipts for the day in question and the arrestee in question, and then returned to the phone.

The brand of cigarettes found on the person of Argus Greene were Viceroy's, he said.

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*The giant black and bronze body turned lazily in the water and surfaced again. It was a reminder of what he'd really come here for.*

# THE RIGHT BAIT

by CARTER SWART

STEEN MOVED CLOSER TO THE CRACKLING FIRE as the gusting wind whipped around the lee side of the island like a banshee. With snifter half-full of Remy Martin and the prospect of an exciting fishing adventure the next day, he was at peace with the world.

*Ah, this is really the life,* he thought, as he took in the roar of the sea as it battered the windward side of Anacapa with unrelenting ferocity. Sheltered as his little camp was behind the westernmost tip of the island, it escaped the fury of the heavy seas but was not immune to the cold wind that swept out of the darkness in numbing blasts.

Willoughby was off somewhere in the night attending the call of nature. Steen had a moment now to marvel at his very good fortune, the blind luck that had somehow directed the old man to Steen's boat this very morning. Steen pondered the vagaries of life which were responsible for his being here on Anacapa Island — this lonely, uninhabited place — and in the company of such a queer duck as Willoughby.

*Maybe we're two of a kind,* mused Steen, a fleeting smile crossing his thin lips. *At least we share one buring interest: that all-encompassing passion to wet the line and see what comes of it. I suppose one could almost call it a sickness, a terminal illness.* He thought back to the morning hours and his fateful meeting with Willoughby.

STEEN HAD PLANNED THE WEEKEND CAREFULLY. It was to be an overnight trip out to Santa Rosa Flats to fish for deepwater red snapper and ling cod. He'd been busy fitting up the sloop for the voyage when he'd become acutely aware that he was being watched. It wasn't so much that he was surprised by this, for many folks liked to gawk at the fishing boats in the Oxnard marina. But this old fellow had come all the way down the ramp to Steen's boat and was leaning casually against the light standard not six feet from where Steen was working.

Now Steen wasn't at all alarmed by this invasion of privacy, for he often wished for company while at the marina. His wife and daughters positively hated the sea, and no inducement could get them into a boat. As a result his frequent outings to the near islands were, for the most part, lonely voyages.

The weathered old salt had looked over Steen's little white sloop from stem to stern, uttering grunts of approval as his eyes fell on each polished fitting. The oldster's admiration, emphasized by low whistles and cheerful nods, did not go unheeded.

"Want to come aboard, sir?" asked Steen, pausing a moment to look the man over.

"Aye, aye," replied the other in a soft voice, a crooked smile passing over his tanned, wrinkled face. He wore a neatly trimmed beard of iron-gray, a perfect color match for his long flowing hair. He appeared to be in his early sixties but was trim and fit. His hands were huge and gnarled, like ancient oaks. He was dressed in clean khakis and old sneakers. There was something compelling about his eyes; they were almost entirely lacking in color, as though there was nothing behind them.

"Dave Steen, skipper of the *Captain Queeg*," offered Steen, holding out his hand.

"Willoughby, Martin Willoughby, at your service," replied the spry old man as he hopped nimbly aboard.

He's closer to 70, thought Steen, as they shook hands. The stranger's grip was powerful, his hands dry and hard. They looked over the ship together as Steen proudly showed off his sparkling-clean vessel.

LATER, THE TWO MEN SAT AND TALKED AMIABLY for awhile, getting acquainted over several chilled Budweisers. The man was a listener and Steen dominated the conversation. When the talk got around to fishing, however, Willoughby took over. The old man not only proved to be an avid fisherman, but an absolute raconteur on the

subject. The man literally lived for the sport.

Willoughby explained that he had recently retired from the Merchant Marines. While plying the Seven Seas he had fished all over the world. He had wet lines from the Baltic to Japan, from Alaska to Argentina. He was a walking encyclopedia of fishing lore and a storyteller of immense ability. Steen warmed to his guest immediately.

It seemed only natural, therefore, that Steen should broach the subject of his plans for the weekend. Willoughby showed keen interest when The Flats were mentioned, and motioned Steen closer with a conspiratorial wink of one bland eye. Lowering his voice, the old man took on an air of great secrecy. He knew, said he, that a man like Steen could appreciate what he was about to reveal, could keep a cherished secret. Steen nodded readily and looked around to assure their privacy. The dock was empty. The tale that Willoughby unfolded literally set Steen's teeth on edge.

It seemed that Willoughby and a friend had once come upon a hidden grotto located beneath the steep cliffs at the westernmost tip of Anacapa Island (just a few miles from the Flats) and here they'd come across a small school of huge groupers. They'd fished the area for a few days but could not tempt the big fish with the bait they'd offered. Willoughby and Larkin (the name struck a sharp chord with Steen) had come back the next fall to spend two fruitless weeks camped out near the grotto, trying in vain to get one of the several groupers to take the hook. Unfortunately, they just couldn't find the right bait. They had sent down a wide variety of baits: mackerel, cheese, shark liver, halibut, perch, corbina . . . anything and everything. Nothing had worked.

Finally, however, a year ago, Willoughby had at last found the right bait. A huge grouper had come out of the grotto and had viciously hit the baited hook, while nearly pulling Willoughby off his tenuous perch. After a lengthy battle Willoughby pulled in a 250 pound beauty!

Willoughby mentioned to Steen that it was about time to go land another. He took several Polaroid pictures from his wallet, showing a proud Willoughby standing next to an immense fish. Steen's mouth actually began to water. The skipper of the *Captain Queeg* almost begged his guest to show him the grotto, to accompany him to Anacapa for a try at the big fish. Willoughby at first demurred politely, but was finally persuaded to lead an expeditionary force to the island. Steen was elated. Steen went off shopping for additional supplies and Willoughby went home to gather his gear and camping equipment.

When they had returned and stowed the gear, Steen reminded Willoughby to bring plenty of the right bait. Willoughby smiled and

said they would have all they would need. At this point Steen refrained from asking the nature of the bait, knowing full well the average fisherman's covetous nature concerning any unusual bait that works well. He almost asked the old man about Larkin, but managed somehow to bury his curiosity for the time-being. He knew he'd heard the name before and for some reason the gut feeling was negative. Anyway they would have plenty of time to get better acquainted on the island.

The pretty white sloop soon headed out to sea and it was no surprise to Steen that Willoughby proved to be an excellent seaman. Both men enjoyed sailing, and the trip out to Anacapa was most pleasant, the time passing quickly as it does when one truly enjoys an experience like this. Steen and Willoughby were a matched pair.

As they neared the island, Willoughby became more introspective, giving commands to Steen in short, dry bursts. Some of the comradery evaporated as the tense moments of tacking-in close to the sheltered little bay gave the dominant role to Willoughby.

The name of Larkin had passed through Steen's mind several times on the voyage out to the island, but he could not catch its elusive meaning. He had the distinct feeling, though, that the name was associated with something unpleasant.

It took awhile for Willoughby to bring the sloop into the sheltering arms of the tiny half-moon bay near the tip of Anacapa, and both men were relieved when the tedious and dangerous job was done. Afterwards, they spent over an hour hauling their equipment — sleeping bags, tents, stove, firewood, fishing gear and food — up onto the sandy beach. Their fishing equipment was excellent, heavy-duty Penn reels, sturdy fiberglass rods, a strong, wicked-looking gaff and several spools of 200 pound-test line. Two cases of beer, ice, and a bottle of Old Charter had been brought along to keep up spirits.

After their camp had been set-up to Willoughby's satisfaction, he asked Steen if he'd like to take a look at the grotto before the sun went down. Steen nodded and, with growing excitement, followed the old fellow across the island and west toward the windward side. After a twenty minute trek they reached a rocky wall on the seaward side. The climb toward the booming breakers was quite dangerous and so it took them some time to reach the narrow ledge that Willoughby was seeking. They finally stopped at an odd outcropping of rock — shaped very much like the head of a gull.

Pointing down toward the rough water, to a wide break in the foam, Willoughby directed Steen's attention to the entrance of a dark opening in the wall some fifty feet below the surface. After what seemed an eternity, a huge black grouper swam lazily out of the grotto



and fanned out alone the wall in search of food. The sight of the fish caused Willoughby's hands to tremble.

Steen's heart pounded with excitement as he asked Willoughby if they shouldn't go back to camp to get their gear. Willoughby shook his head and pointed at the fast-waning sun. He said not to worry, that Steen could be the first one in the water the next morning.

By seven o'clock they had steak and eggs sizzling over a hot fire. After they finished the meal they toasted the morrow with bourbon and beer.

For some obscure reason Willoughby seemed to go into a shell after dinner, and so Steen snapped on the portable radio and caught part of the Rams' game. Willoughby just sat and stared into the fire, seemingly unaffected by his surroundings, deep in his own private world. Soon the wind came up and sent both men running to the tent for sweaters and jackets. Steen returned to the fire but Willoughby ambled off into the night.

AND NOW, WHILE WILLOUGHBY STALKED THE DESERTED island, Steen watched the glow of the fire dance through the two-carat diamond ring on his right hand, enchanted as always by the rainbow of brilliant colors the fire inspired. The big ring was his one indulgence, and he was very proud of it. He yawned, and found to his surprise that he was getting quite drowsy. Too much of this, he mumbled, as he downed the last of the brandy, his mind dulled by the fiery liquor.

Willoughby's strange shift in attitude, from keen anticipation to a kind of sullen taciturnity, coming as abruptly as it had, gave Steen pause now to wonder at what might lie behind the other's strange behavior. There seemed to be a seething anger in the man, as though he was engaged in a silent battle with himself, as though he now regretted making the trip. *He's definitely an odd sort*, mused Steen, as he watched the complete spectrum of colors dance through his ring. *What the heck's wrong with the old buzzard? Maybe he's hooked one grouper too many. Maybe he's a tad off-plumb. Maybe it's the full moon, maybe the answer lies there.* Steen laughed aloud.

He opened a can of cold beer and drummed up a picture of Willoughby in his mind: piggish nose, flowing mane of gray, feral features and damp, empty eyes. Not the sort of guy you'd invite home for dinner. *This could be a mighty long weekend if Willoughby doesn't snap out of his trance*, grumbled Steen as he pulled on his beer.

Soon another thing began to needle him — the matter of the bait. The subject had come up twice during the evening and Willoughby

had managed to fend off Steen's polite inquiries with rude grunts and prolonged silence. When finally pressed for an answer, Willoughby would only say that he'd produce the bait in the morning.

Like a child who's been told not to touch, Steen began to dwell on the mystery of the bait. He figured that it must be in Willoughby's pack. They had taken every bit of gear to the island, leaving not so much as an extra sinker aboard ship. Steen's curiosity finally got the better of him and he rose from his cramped position and walked up the path leading to the mouth of a barren valley above.

For a long time he peered into the night, checking the moonlit landscape for movement. There was none. He quickly went back to the camp and entered the tent.

Ducking low on all fours, he passed through the narrow doorway and crawled over to Willoughby's side of the shelter. He spent several minutes rifling through the older man's pack, but could find nothing that would pass as bait. There was no bait!

He went back to the fire and threw the last of the wood onto the glowing coals. A blast of wind came up and caused the wood to ignite immediately, lighting up the camp and deepening the shadows outside.

The bait thing worked at Steen's mind, nagging him with speculations. And there was this Larkin problem too. What about Larkin? Steen began to wonder about the possibility that he'd made a mistake in praising his luck earlier. After all, Willoughby was a perfect stranger and his recent shift in attitude did not inspire one to feel much like adding his name to one's address book. On the other hand he had led Steen to the groupers and had proven as good as his word in every other respect. Steen's ambivalent notions about Willoughby were interrupted when the old man appeared suddenly, walking in out of the night with the light step of a gazelle.

Steen's irritation showed in his voice. "Where have you been?"

"Just walkin'," replied Willoughby as he sat down across the fire from Steen.

"You've been gone more than two hours."

"So?"

Willoughby's rather cavalier attitude pushed Steen to asking about the bait again, even though he had sworn to himself to not badger Willoughby about it any more that night. "Forget it," Steen said carefully, "I was thinking about the bait we'll use tomorrow. I'd like to know what it is."

Willoughby's long hair flowed in the wind as the old man stared fully at Steen and hunched closer to the fire, his eyes turned empty and

baleful, like the eyes of a dog caught in the headlight's beam. Without moving his lips the oldster managed to hiss: "Tomorrow, Mr. Steen. I'll show you tomorrow." The answer was final. Steen looked away, feeling uneasy, frightened by the cold calculation in those unwinking eyes.

"Just as you say," replied Steen, eager to be gone. A chill went down his spine as Willoughby continued to stare at him across the fire.

Steen shivered and rose to his feet. "I'm hitting the sack."

"Night, Mr. Steen," muttered the other, his unflinching gaze sending the younger man packing.

Steen went swiftly to the tent and closed the flap with an angry snap. Willoughby stared into the fire and smiled.

As Steen finished zipping up his comfy sleeping bag, it finally came to him . . . the thing about Larkin. Though half-asleep, Steen managed to dredge up a hazy memory of reading about a missing fisherman named Larkin. It was last year that the local man had been lost at sea while fishing off the California coast near Anacapa Island. His body had not been recovered and his death had been written off as an accident. Was it the same Larkin? Was Willoughby's former partner one-and-the-same? He yawned hugely. He'd ask Willoughby tomorrow. With that, Steen drifted into a deep sleep.

**THE FOLLOWING MORNING THE TWO MEN WERE UP EARLY, eager to get down to the magic grotto and throw out their lines.**

Willoughby seemed to be under a great strain, and when he talked his words came out like bullets. His eyes seemed to glow with an inner fire when Steen (whose confidence had been shored-up by the dawn's early light) once again chipped away at the bait question.

"You'll see, you'll see," croaked Willoughby with a nasty glare. Steen decided he'd ask about Larkin later in the day.

After a cold breakfast of cereal and milk the two fisherman loaded up their gear and marched west, retracing their footsteps from the day before. Willoughby was in the lead. Snatches of grunts and mumbling drifted back to Steen, who began to wonder in earnest if Willoughby might not be a certifiable lunatic.

*It's those damned groupers, thought Steen. Willoughby's gone bonkers on those fish.* But to be fair, Steen had to admit that the thought of landing one himself sent his blood racing. *We're both probably a little nuts,* he finally decided.

As they gingerly descended the rocky cliff overlooking the grotto, Willoughby motioned to Steen to take the lead, grunting uncivilly under his breath that Steen had the lighter burden . . . as indeed he

had. The change was made and the slow climb down the treacherous trail continued.

A few moments later Steen (moved by a sudden inexplicable urge to look behind him) glanced back over his shoulder and saw, to his horror, that Willoughby was preparing to run him through with the lethal gaff — a 5-foot wooden pole with a 9-inch curved steel hook on the end!

And in the split-second it took for him to dive for safety, Steen knew at last what Willoughby was planning to use for bait!

Willoughby's whistling thrust missed Steen by less than an inch, sending the attacker after the scuttling victim with a howl of disappointment. As Willoughby got within range of his terrified prey and hauled back the gaff for the final blow, he stepped on a round little rock and twisted his ankle. With an agonized grimace he reached down for the injured member only to lose his balance and pitch headlong down the sheer cliff. His scream was cut short when he struck the jagged rocks below. The crunch of that collision echoed all the way back to Steen. It was hideous.

For a long time Steen hunched down on the upper path, afraid to move. The horror of the situation, of Willoughby, was difficult to swallow. Steen's breath came in small, shallow gasps as he came to grips with the fact that the demented man was actually going to kill him and use his flesh for bait. The thought made him vomit.

Finally Steen gathered his courage and carefully made his way down to the old man. Willoughby was dead. His head was broken like a ripe melon, and his left arm was hanging by a mere thread of tissue. Copious amounts of blood had run down into the turbulent sea, causing the froth to redden. Steen stared at the wreckage of Martin Willoughby and vomited again.

At that moment a huge black grouper — the largest Steen had ever seen — pushed right up to the rocky cliff nearest Willoughby and took a savage swipe at the bloody froth. Steen stared in awe. The giant black and bronze body turned lazily in the water and came to the surface again, a tantalizing reminder to Steen of what he'd really come here for. He looked back at the corpse, then sat down suddenly on a nearby rock.

LATE THAT AFTERNOON DAVE STEEN BROUGHT the *Captain Queeg* safely into the Oxnard marina. His arrival prompted an unprecedented outcry of astonishment from the onlookers by virtue of his ship's bizarre cargo — the battered corpse of one Martin Willoughby (decently hidden beneath a bloody blanket) and the biggest grouper folks in those parts had ever seen! ●

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*I slipped the .38 into my belt beneath my coat. I would be on-camera the entire episode. It would be the perfect time to kill the one who stood in my way!*

# NOT IN THE SCRIPT

by CARL HENRY RATHJEN

I HAD TO KILL DAVE WALKER. I hated that decision. He was a nice guy. I'd known him for ten years, but now he was stifling me, standing in the way of my future.

I'd bought a gun, a snub-nosed .38. Now all I needed was the opportunity — and the guts — to use it.

Don't get the idea I'm a mousy type. Not at all. I spent five years in Viet-Nam, and before that there'd been football at UCLA, then a rough three years on the defensive line of the Rams. So I wasn't a stranger to

violence when it had to be done as part of a team. But this problem with Dave Walker would have to be a solo effort, and it was out of character for me — that was the tough part of it.

Since coming home from Nam with a game leg which meant no more football, I'd gone into TV and did some work in Hollywood. I should have first dyed the growing gray out of my hair, but the gray landed me my first role, as the kindly uncle in *The Second Man in the House*. That set the pattern. From then on I was cast as the understanding older friend, the sympathetic doctor, the compassionate judge, the tough old cop with a heart of mush.

Then I became acquainted with Dave Walker when I was asked to read for the part of the beloved father and grandfather in the new soap opera, *The Children's Children*. There were, and still are, several unique things about that show. It is not a daytime soap opera, but runs in the early evenings on prime time. It has become one of the longest running soap operas. Other networks had made supreme efforts to crack its rating, and had failed.

The most unique feature about it was that it was done *live*!

Irving Barnes, one of the co-producers, was an oldtimer who had begun in TV in the old days when everything was done live. Even today, when just about everything is taped, including many sports events and canned laughter, Irv still insisted on a live show. He claimed it made for spontaneity and reality. We were all given our sides, our lines, to study a day in advance. We had one rehearsal of the dialog and action; then we went before the cameras and studio audience and that was *it*. If one of us blew a line the cameras weren't stopped and the scene done over. We were *live*; the show *had* to go on. So the rest of the cast would have to ad lib around the blooper, or adapt to it.

And sometimes the adapting was rough. Like the dinner party sequence in one airing. My "wife" in the series, Cora Heatherton, choked on a morsel of food to the point where she started to turn blue. Did Irv Barnes stop the cameras and rush off-scene crew members in to give first aid? Hell, no! The cameras kept turning, putting the whole thing out to the nation on prime time, and it was up to the others in the scene to give Cora first-aid. Nothing worked until I gave her the Heimlich treatment to clear her air passage.

Afterwards Irv started to praise us for a terrifically realistic scene.

"Oh, man," he exclaimed, "this will push the ratings and Dave Walker out of sight."

"To hell with the ratings and Dave Walker," I raged. "Cora damn near died out there!"

"More spontaneous and realistic than anything the writers could have dreamed up," Irv drooled.

That's when I knocked out his front teeth.

"How's that for realism?" I asked as he lay on the floor blinking up at me.

THAT WAS YEARS AGO, and recently when I told him I wanted out from the show he just put a finger to his front denture and blinked at me. I knew then not to waste anymore breath with him. I needed help to go beyond him and break free from the contract that bound me to Dave Walker.

I spoke to Bob Rollins, one of the writers who had a real "in" upstairs and could go over Irv's head.

"I need your help, Bob. Write me out of the show."

"You're nuts," he said.

"I'm not," I replied. "I've been offered a part in a Broadway play and been asked to consider some big TV specials. It's something I've been hoping for for years. A chance for roles that I can get my teeth into, to be more than the stock stereotype I've become in this opus."

Bob understood.

"I guess it does get kind of stale after a while. I get the same feeling myself, writing about the same characters day after day, year after year."

"Then you'll help me break the contract to get free of Dave Walker and Irv?"

"No," he said. "Too risky. Irv would never go for it."

"How's it risky?" I demanded. "If you get upstairs approval to write me out of the show, Irv could rant and rave, but —"

"Upstairs would never go for it," Bob argued. "You've become an integral part."

"No one's integral," I insisted. I mentioned a "character" who'd supposedly been an integral part of the family in the series. On the way to the studio one morning after a night on the town he ran his car head-on into a truck. Bob did a fast rewrite on that day's episode and the rest of us, in genuine shock, stumbled and ad libbed our way through it in the live airing.

Bob nodded at my reminder, but still shook his head.

"I've got a family and obligations that are integral parts of me. And there is an additional very integral reason why I can't and won't go upstairs to help you, much as I'd like to."

"What reason?" I demanded.

"I'm not under contract upstairs," Bob said. "I'm under personal contract to Irv Barnes."

SO THAT WAS IT. Any further effort would have to be mine alone. I spent days and nights in intense thought, planning to eliminate Dave Walker and not become entangled in accusations that would destroy my hopes for the future.

Then, one day, I saw the opportunity coming. Freshening up in my dressing room after rehearsal I slipped the .38 into my belt beneath my coat. I would be on-camera the entire episode that evening and wouldn't have time to duck back to my room for the gun.

The sequence that evening dealt with my "wife" and I discussing the many and various problems confronting our family. We'd drained our savings and mortgaged the house to help one of our sons, our daughter was messing up her marriage, and in typical soap opera complications one of our teen-age grandchildren was a fugitive from a hit-and-run accident, another was accused of pushing drugs . . .

Playing the scene, I saw Irv Barnes and some of the upstairs brass watching. Yes, tonight was the night to get Dave Walker. I missed a cue line from Cora and hastily ad libbed to cover up. Then I ad libbed some more lines, changing the direction of the scene. I saw Bob Rollins frown. Cora looked a little worried, trying to follow along with me.

Then, suddenly, I cried out: "It's all too much. I just can't take it anymore!"

I pulled out the gun, swung it to my head. Cora screamed and reached out to me. I spun away toward the brass and doubled over to hide the gun from the cameras as I fired it across my body, not close to my head. After all, I was an actor, and had to think of my looks and not risk disfiguring my face with powder burns.

I fell to the floor. After a shocked moment, Cora knelt beside me, crying and wailing. I thought she was going to let me down . . . after I'd actually saved her life on scene years ago.

Sobbing, she rose and stumbled to the telephone on the set. The cameras and the mike on the boom followed her. She dialed.

"P-Please send an ambulance. Hurry, but I'm afraid it's too late. I'm a former nurse. I know."

Through slitted eyes, concealed from the cameras, I saw Bob Rollins smiling and Irv Barnes glaring. They knew what was coming and because the show was *live* they couldn't stop it.

"Oh, yes, of course," Cora, my stage wife, said brokenly. "The address." She gave it, then added, "It's my home, and my late husband's, Dave Walker."



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*At the top of her head, where her hair should have been parted, a fist-size chunk of her skull was missing. Black, matted blood ran down the side of her face. She was smiling, beckoning to him . . .*

# BEDROOM SET

by RICHARD GRANT

*BDRM. set, all wood, dresser w/mirror, bed frame and headboard, nightstand, all exc. cond., \$50; 237-8769, eves., wknds.*

“YOU STILL GOT THAT BEDROOM SET?”

“Sure do.”

“Can I come over and look at it?”

“Yeah. You know there’s no mattress with the bed?”

“That’s fine,” Carl Schneider said. He already had a mattress and box springs — his wife (make that *ex*-wife) got the frame along with nearly everything else. He took down the address and drove across town to a small, somewhat run down cheesebox house in the suburbs. An old man was puttering around in the garage.

“Mr. Marshall? I’m here to look at the furniture.”

“Oh, right. Well, come on in.” The old man led the way past the

front door of badly chipping paint into the living room stuffed with boxes. He took a left and went into a square room with pink walls. "Here she is."

The furniture sat in the empty room looking bored, like passengers in an all night bus stop. In the corner was a light wood dresser with a large frameless mirror bolted on top. The empty bedframe and headboard occupied the center of the room; next to it was a matching nightstand. "You want it?"

Schneider didn't have to think long. The price was good, even if the furniture wasn't. It would get him by until he got settled. "Yes, I'll take it."

"Got 50 bucks cash?"

Schneider handed the money to the old man.

"Yeah, you got a good price there, son," Marshall said, counting the bills. "Could of got more for it, but it's not worth the trouble. Just selling it to settle my daughter's estate. This use to be hers. She died."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yeah," Marshall said, nonchalantly sticking the bills in his wallet. "October 24th she stuck a .38 in her mouth and ended her troubles." He pointed, almost as an afterthought, to the ceiling.

Schneider looked up and was shocked to see a bullet hole. A sliver of a metal slug was still protruding from the ceiling. The hole was directly over the center of the bed frame.

*So that's why there's no mattress,* he thought, nauseated by the image of the girl sitting on the bed — *his* bed now — watching herself in the mirror put the gun in her mouth.

"I'd help you load this stuff, but I had a heart attack recently."

"Huh? Oh yeah, sure. I'll load it myself," Schneider said, looking at the ceiling again.

THAT EVENING, SCHNEIDER HAD THE FIRST of the nightmares. He had arranged the dresser and mirror so that they sat at the foot of the bed. In the dream, he awoke startled by a noise, and in the silver-blue moonlight of the room looked into the mirror.

And failed to see himself.

Instead, the mirror reflected the image of a young girl with long straight brown hair and sad eyes. There was something wrong with her, Schneider thought. He couldn't make it out at first in the dim light, and then he saw it. At the top of her head, where her hair should have been parted, a fist-sized chunk of her skull was missing. Black, matted blood ran down the side of her face.

She was smiling and pointing at Schneider, then curling her finger

backwards, beckoning him to come. *Come where?* he thought. *Into the mirror?*

He sat up in bed, shaking, his stomach muscles contracting, his skin itching. The girl's expression never changed. She curled her finger in a slow methodical pace.

And then he was awake, sweating, staring at his own white face in the mirror from behind the mass of tangled sheets.

The first night he shook the dream off and went back to sleep. The second night he panicked. Afraid of going to bed, he stayed up late, reading in front of the TV. When he read the same page twice and still couldn't understand it, he got up in a groggy daze, shuffled to the bedroom, slipped under the covers and was out in an instant.

The girl came back. This time Schneider recognized the noise that woke him — a muffled gunshot. He sat up in bed. The girl was still smiling, still beckoning him with those sad eyes. He tried to look away, but an invisible vice held his face in position. So he shifted his eyes, looked at the foot of the bed, and nearly threw up. It was speckled with drops of blood. He screamed. The girl smiled and curled her finger. He screamed again, an involuntary cry this time. The sound of pure terror — meaningless, horrible noises — ripped from his throat and bounced back at him from the walls.

He was still screaming when he woke up. He spent the rest of the night on the couch, and in the morning, still dressed in his pajamas, went to the kitchen, grabbed his tool kit and approached the dresser and mirror.

Doubtlessly there was some deep psychological reason behind the dreams, but Schneider didn't have the time to find out what it was. The mirror was the central feature of the nightmares, so the mirror had to go.

It was bolted on to the back of the dresser with three large screws. He pulled the top drawer out to get at the nuts and was carrying it to the bed, when his fingers felt something. He turned the drawer over, tossing socks and underwear on the bed, and there, held in place on the bottom of the drawer with thick black electrician's tape, was a large manilla envelope.

*Money? why not,* he thought. God knows, it had happened often enough before. He dug his fingernails under the tape, noticing that they were shaking just a little, and ripped it off. The envelope came free. He tore open the clasp and dumped the contents on the dresser.

It wasn't money. A small notebook, some letters and a half dozen Polaroid shots scattered on the chest. Schneider picked up one of the photographs. It was a young girl, in her early twenties with a skinny

body, dirty blond hair and large bags under her eyes. She was sitting naked on a bed. Schneider recognized the pink walls and the headboard. On the back of the picture, written in a delicate script, was "Me, April 1979."

He glanced at the other pictures. They were all the same, only the poses changed. He gathered them up and placed them face down, feeling just a little sick and greasy for having invaded the privacy of the dead. At least the girl in the photos was not the girl in his dreams.

He looked hurriedly through the letters. They were all from a girl named Susan Johnston and dated in the upper right hand corner over a two month period. From the first few paragraphs of the first letter he learned that Susan was spending the summer in California — and having a great time. He was putting them down when a phrase written in capitals and underlined caught his attention. It read:

**DAVID IS NOT TRYING TO KILL YOU!**

He snatched the letter back up and read it quickly.

*I mean, it's ridiculous. Why would he want to kill you? So he got mad and he pushed you. You said yourself that it was an accident that you cut your wrist on the broken glass. What was he supposed to do at the hospital — tell them that he did it? That would've been great. Then you would have been there by yourself with ten stitches in your hand and your boyfriend would have been in jail. I think the suicide story he told them was pretty quick thinking. What do you care what some hospital flunkies think? I know it's not the first time he hit you, but guys are like that. You got to roll with the punches, kid. If I was worried about anything, I'd be worried about what he might do if you tried to break up with him.*

The rest of the letters were about California. Schneider read through all of them, but he found no more references to any trouble. There was even a postscript on one of the last ones that said, *Glad to hear that you and David are getting along better.*

He shook his head and bundled the letters together. It probably meant nothing. But why would she keep letters like this taped to the bottom of a drawer?

The notebook was a simple ring bound style with a plain red cover. He scanned through it and saw that it was in the form of a diary. None of the dates were marked. On the title page, in the same neat script, was written: *Mary Marshall.*

Slowly, he read the diary.

*Yesterday was horrible. David was getting off work early, so I gave him a key so he could meet me here. When I opened the door, he grabbed me by the blouse and threw me across the room. He*

*was yelling like a crazy man, and waving something at me. When I saw it was my diary, I nearly fainted. Oh God, when I think of some of the things I wrote about him in there, I'm surprised he didn't kill me. He hit me in the eye. It's all swollen up and looks terrible. I had to take Friday off from work, and I put makeup on it yesterday, but it still looks like hell. He tore my diary to shreds. Two years I've kept that thing, and he just ripped it apart, screaming at me and reading parts of it to me, and twisting my arm until I screamed it wasn't true. I don't want to think about it. I'm going to have to be more careful where I leave things. He'll be looking for them now. I read in some-book about taping things under drawers. I hope he didn't read the same book.*

The next two entries were mild. She went on to describe her job problems and the fact that she was coming down with a cold.

There was an entry about her and David going to a disco and having a great time. It didn't seem to Schneider that it could be describing the same two people.

The next five pages followed the same vein. There was a lot about some report for Mr. Jenkins that required overtime, almost a full page describing a coat she wanted and how she was going to save the money to get it, a list of movies she and David wanted to see, with check marks added after the ones they already had, and a note about how great the weather had been. There was even a page of signatures written: "Mrs. David Harris, Mary Harris, Mrs. Mary Harris.

Then the handwriting became jagged.

*I'm not going to put up with it anymore! He's crazy. We were in Jim's having a beer. This cute guy walked by, and I just smiled at him. I swear, that's all I did. David dug his finger nails into my arm and pressed down until he almost drew blood. He whispered to me that if I screamed he'd break my forearm like a matchstick. He would have too. I had to walk outside with him and walk to the car. My legs were shaking cause I knew he was going to beat me. But he didn't. He sat in the car and just looked at me for a long time. I was too scared to even cry. His eyes looked pitch black. Then he said, real slow, that if I ever went with another man he'd kill me. That's just how he said it. 'I'll kill you and make it look like a suicide. They'll believe it — you've already tried it three times.' I said that the other time he'd been the one that nearly killed me with the broken glass. I don't know why I was so brave.*

*He just laughed and said that nobody knew that but him. I don't know what to do. I tried to talk to Susan, but she doesn't understand. She likes them rough, and she's always had a crush on*

*David anyway. I don't know what to do.*

There were three other entries, but Schneider hardly read them. *I'll kill you and make it look like a suicide* was all he could remember.

It was possible to do that, he supposed. If the girl had a history of suicide attempts, the police wouldn't investigate too deeply. But what should he do about it?

He put everything back in the envelope and tossed it on the dresser. He smoked a cigarette, tapped his fingers on the envelope, then opened it again. "Susan Johnston" was the name on the return address of the letters. He dug out the phone book, found an S. Johnston and called the number.

A girl answered on the third ring.

"Susan Johnston?"

"Yes."

"Susan, you don't know me, ah, my name's Carl Schneider, ah . . ."

"You're right — I don't know you. And I don't think I want to. Do you know what time it is?"

"Please don't hang up," Schneider rushed out. He didn't want to sound crazy, and yet it was hard to think of a way not to. "Did you know a Mary Marshall?"

There was a long pause, then a hesitant "Yes."

"Well Susan, I purchased some furniture from Mary's father — Mary's old bedroom set — and, ah, taped underneath one of the drawers in the dresser, I found some letters and things, and, um, well, maybe it doesn't mean anything, but I think somebody should have a look at them."

"What kind of letters?" Her voice was still hesitant.

"There were a few from you from when you were in California, and . . ."

"You read them!"

"Well yes, of course."

"What other things did you find?"

"A diary, some photographs."

"Her diary was . . . she told me she lost her diary."

"Yes. Yes, she mentions that in this one. She also mentions a lot about a boyfriend named David. Of course, I didn't know either of them, but if what she writes in this diary is true, I think there should be some investigation into her suicide. Maybe the police already did everything they could, but, well, I'd like you to look through it and see what you think."

"Listen, Carl you said your name was? Well listen, Carl, Mary was really going crazy near the end. I knew her and and I knew she was

going to do something extreme. I don't see how my letters are going to make any difference."

"It's not just your letters. There's this diary . . ." Schneider took a deep breath. "Susan, I think this guy David killed her."

"That's crazy. It's impossible."

"If you read the diary . . ."

"I don't have to read the diary. I knew Mary."

"Well, I'll bring it to her father then. Maybe . . ."

"That creep will just throw it away."

"Okay, then I'll take it to the police."

There was a long pause again. "You're really serious about this, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Okay, but you're making a mistake. Even if Mary said David killed her in that diary, you can't believe it. I could tell you some of the things she said, but if you want, I'll look at the thing."

SCHNEIDER GAVE HER THE ADDRESS and she promised to be over in an hour. He quickly made the bed, put on some coffee and got dressed. His adrenalin was pumping, but it wasn't a bad feeling. His senses were sharp, the smell of hot coffee flooded his nostrils. For the first time since his divorce he felt alive.

Certainly, he had empathy for the girl — the horror of her narrative in the diary was vivid enough for him to feel for her. And it was a nasty way to go out. But he couldn't suppress his elation. Twice he caught himself smiling. It was exciting, damn it. His hands were tingling. A message had come back from the grave to point its finger at the accused, and he possessed it.

He would go over the diary with Susan, convince her of its importance, and together they would go to the police. Perhaps they would use him in some way to confront this boyfriend David. He was fantasizing this final scene when the buzzer rang.

He practically flew to the door, threw it open, then stepped back. The frame was filled with a six foot man wearing jeans and a brown leather jacket. "Carl Schneider?" the man asked.

"Yes."

"Um," the man looked mildly embarrassed. "Ah, look, I'm Susan's boyfriend. It's nothing personal, but, you know, she gets this wild phone call at six in the morning from some guy she never heard of, and he asks her to come over to his apartment, and, well, you see where I'm coming from, don't you? She just wanted me to check you out."

"Yes, yes, of course," Schneider said, but he could feel his face flushing. "Come in."

The big man followed him in. "I suppose you'll want to see the diary?" Schneider said.

"Yeah."

"I should have realized my call would sound a little crazy. I just got caught up in it."

The man shrugged. "Hey, you know what chicks are like. Don't even think about it. It is a little weird though. The diary was taped under a drawer, huh?"

"Yes, just a second, I'll get it." Schneider went into the kitchen, the big man followed him.

"Hey, Carl, you couldn't spare a cup of coffee could you?"

"Certainly." He pointed to the diary on the kitchen table, then went over to the coffee machine. "Cream and sugar?"

"Fine."

"By the way," Schneider called over his shoulder. "I don't think I caught your name."

"Harris," the big man said right behind him. "David Harris."

*WOOD bdrm. set: bed frame w/headboard, dresser & mirror,  
nightstand. \$35 733-3902, ask for Jeff.*

"THIS JEFF?"

"Yes, Jeff Schneider. Can I help you?"

"Yeah, I'm calling about your ad. You still got the bedroom set?"

"Yes."

"It's kind of cheap, is it any good?"

"It belonged to my brother. I'm in town only to settle his estate. I have to sell it quickly or give it away."

"Okay. Yeah, well I guess I'd like to look at it. By the way, there's no mattress, right?"

"No," Jeff said quietly, his mind once again seeing the police pictures — his brother lying there, mouth open, eyes frozen with horror, the gun clenched in his hand. *Where*, he asked himself for the hundredth time, *had Carl ever got an unmarked gun? And a suicide? It was unbelievable. He was depressed about the divorce no doubt, but kill himself over it? It was just unthinkable. You never know what goes on inside anybody*, Jeff thought. He was even wondering about himself this morning — after that dream last night with the mirror. He felt an uncomfortable shudder go through his body. "No," he said softly, "there's no mattress."



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*I wenta git my 12 gage shotgun from offin the rack  
atop the mantle. Double-ought buckshot would sure  
kill em both!*

# GITTIN BY

by JAY FOX

FORTY ACRES AIN'T HARDLY ENUFF TO CALL A FARM anymore, not with all them big corpyrations, their fancy machines in their fields what goes as fer as the eye kin see. But forty acres is what we got, Martha an me, an we git by, raisin near all we eat plus a few hogs fer market an lots a little feeder pigs what we sells to 4H kids to fatten fer the fair, an to city folks newly moved to the hills what play-act farmin an calls themselves "homesteaders."

We got chickens an rabbits fer the table an hens fer fresh eggs, the extries a which Martha sells in town fer pocket money. An we grows all are own feed right on the place — cain't afford to buy it. Them big out-fits kin sell a plucked chicken all done up in plastic cheaper than I kin buy scratch to raise one from a chick.

Gotta big grinder in the back corner a the barn where I fixes feed fer chickens, rabbits an hogs too — grindin corn, wheat an oats along with bone meal fer vitymins an such, all the way I learnt from *my* Daddy who learnt from *his* Daddy. Only difference now is we got power an I don't hafta turn the dang grinder by hand like they allys done.

Hardest part now is gittin good help fer the wages we kin pay. Welfare bein so dang easy to git in town, not many wants farm work at all, an them what do wants them big machines what harvest an acre quicker than I kin hitch a mule.

It was Martha who sed, "Jesse, why dontcha run a ad in one a them *homesteader* magazines?" We seen em at places where we sells feeder pigs — fancy things with color pictures an stories what makes small farmin sound like it might be fun. I spect the folks what think that might also fine pleasure beatin theirselves with a Blacksmith hammer.

But I listens to Martha now an agin. She's my second wife, the first bein long in her grave, a good bit yunger than me an sometimes smarter in the ways a city folks. Figured we might fine us one a them hippy fellas willin to work cheap just a smell clean country air, sleep in a hayloft an mebbe write fer one a their homesteader magazines bout how he done it.

SO I DONE LIKE MARTHA SED AN SPENT FORTY DOLLARS fer one a them classfyied ads. Sure enuff next month Harry Sutcliffe wrote back from one a them fancy colleges where he was fixin to drop out. Thing was, Martha sed he dint spell much better than me, an I cain't figure how he got to drop *in*.

But beins he's the only one that wrote, I decided to give Sutcliffe a try. Ise not about to let forty dollars, near all we git fer a feeder pig, go plum to waste.

Harry showed up at the place bout two weeks later. He took the bus out from town, somethin our county got new along wit the dang taxes goin up agin. Funny bout taxes. My Granddaddy ran the place an made it pay, leastways enuff to raise eight kids an school most a them. Had 160 acres then.

My Daddy hadda sell 40 acres to keep the dang county from takin it all fer taxes, an I've hadda sell 80 acres to keep the last 40. If Martha an me have a son, I plum don't know what *he's* gonna do!

Anyways, Harry werent a bad lookin boy. Not bad at all. Not all puny an pail like most city folks who look like theyd fall over in the first strong wind. An could he eat! They mustnt feed em at all in them fancy colleges cause the kid ate like a hayin crew soon he walked in the door.

"This is great!" Harry said at supper. "I am really *into* natural food!"

I dint unnerstan that at all. Plainly, Harry was not *into* food of any kind. The food was all gittin into *Harry*. He specially liked Martha's home-baked bread. He ate dang near a whole loaf an then he sed it

agin — "I'm really *into* homemade bread!"

That jus plain don't make sense. It was the bread gittin into Harry, not tuther way around. But Martha dint seem to mind the funny way he talked, she jus kept smilin an passin the bread an butter to that boy.

Next day I learnt he sez *bad* when what he means is *good*. He was watchin whilst I was guttin a hog, an he sed, "Jesse, you are really *bad* with that knife!"

An I *know* I is good! I is probbly the best pig sticker in six counties. I done all are own an others fer homesteaders what cain't yet stan the sight a blood. I kin hiest a full growed pig by its hine legs an stick its juggler vane quicker than most folks can blink.

But when the hog was all scraped an chilled an I was carvin, dang if he dint say it agin. "You cut just like a surgeon," Harry sed. "Hams, bacon, spare ribs . . . zip, zip, zip. Jesse, you are sooo *baaad* with that knife!"

Then whilst watchin Martha pluck a goose an savin down what she uses to make quilts, the extries a which bring a fine price in town, he sed, "Home-grown goose down for quilts . . . that is *heavy*!"

We all knows that down is bout the *lightest* stuff they is! So I axed him, "Harry, what was you studyin in that fancy college you was at?"

"Polly Sigh," sound liked he sed to me.

"What's that?"

"Political Science."

Sure now that splains it! I know them politicians never talk straight, but I dint know they learnt em how not to in school!

Martha she jus smiled at that strange talkin boy like havin her fine quilt called *heavy* was next best to a blue ribbon at the fair.

WELL, EVEN IF HE TALKED FUNNY — full backward at times — Harry made a pretty fine hand the first few weeks. I learnt him to mend fence, slop hogs, hiest corn into the hopper an the grinder, an all chores such as that.

Then ole Harry started gittin hard to fine. One day I leff him to clean the farrowin stalls whilst I plowed out back, but when I came roun agin Harry werent there an them stalls werent near clean enuff.

I seed him later amblin back from up to the house as he jus smiles an sed, "I smelled Martha's fresh-baked bread, and I *had* to have some while it was still warm. I am really *into* fresh-baked bread!"

I believed then mebbe he was, but when he slipped off two er three more times, I commenced to wonderin if he might be samplin more than fresh bread like he sed. Crosst my mine he might also be checkin Martha's goose down quilt from the underside.

I know fer sure everytime that boy came roun, Martha start grinnin like ole cat in a cow barn at milkin time.

Course I know better than cusse a man on spishon alone, so I decided to start watchin ole Harry real close. Next day I leff him shuckin corn whilst I claim to be fixin a leak in the water tank. It bein atop a twenty foot tower, I had me a fine view a the whole place.

An when I seed Harry slippin off like I thought he might, I jus come down the ladder an went slippin after. An sure enuff, I herd em at the backa the house, Martha gigglin like a school girl, ole Harry breathin hard, an that goose down quilt just a russlin away.

I first wenta git my 12 gage from offin the rack atop the mantle . . . then I got ta thinkin, double-ought buckshot would sure kill Martha too, an even if she done wronged me terrible, I loved her still an I needed her more.

A man cain't run even forty acres all by hisself. Needs a woman to cook and clean and can fer winter, an these days a farm wife be harder to fine than hired hands. As danged ole Harry would say, "They is all *into* that lib stuff, wänna be doctors, lawyers and twisty-talkin politicians too."

So I leff them an the 12 gage be an I commenced to thinkin real hard.

MARTHA SHE SEEM REAL SPRISED when ole Harry don't come fer breakfast nixt day. Had smoked ham, hashed taters an eggs all scrambled up an smellin good clear down to the barn.

"Saw him early as he was leavin," I splained. "Dint like the hills near much as he thought."

"He'd sure sed good-bye iffing he want to leave," Martha sed.

I helt her hand an sed soff as I could, "Mebbe he dint like nuthin here near much as you thought."

She looked plain vexed at that an sed, "Herd the grinder going real early . . ."

"Had to get a good start," I splained. "With no helper no more, I got twice the usual to do."

"Still funny he dint least say good-bye," she sed in a pout.

Mebbe Martha still wonders now an agin bout Harry, an mebbe she wonders bout me as well. But we're gittin by. She knows better than cusse a man on spishon alone, an spishon's all there ever kin be, her not knowin fer sure where ole Harry went or why.

Acourse I do, an I think it right proper. He been hiested by his hine legs an carved real bad, messed by the grinder good . . . an now ole Harry is really gittin *into* pigs.

---

*The lines of marital communication were down. It was time to consider alternative means of solving the problem!*

# DEAR AMITY

by HAL CHARLES

May 10

DEAR AMITY,

I don't put much stock in advice columns. They always seem aimed at silly housewives with nothing better to do than eavesdrop on other people's misery. In fact, most letters are so ridiculous ~~they~~ that I suspect they are more fiction than fact. However, since your column, "Ask Amity" first appeared last month in *The Times*, I have noticed that the letters seem more credible and your responses more reasonable. That is why I'm writing to you about my problem.

My wife and I have been happily married for over ten years. Until recently she has been content in her role as housewife. Oh, she'd taken a ~~few~~ few "enrichment" courses at the university, but most of her time was spent cooking and cleaning, and liking it. Then, she suddenly declared she wanted to go to ~~work~~ work.

Please pardon my typing.

Now everything's changed. When I get home from work, she's seldom there. We've been forced to eat out more because she doesn't feel like cooking. My shirts go a week without being ironed, and she's even suggested I help out around the house.

I'm fed up. How can I get things back to normal?

Upset Husband  
Box 433  
City

• • •

May 25

DEAR UPSET HUSBAND,

Please excuse the delay. The response to this column has been overwhelming, creating a huge backlog.

Your problem is not that uncommon in today's society. More and more women are finding jobs outside the home, and tension often develops as a result of this upsetting of the status quo.

Have you tried to discuss this situation with your wife? Letting her know your feelings might bring you two closer; allowing your frustrations to smoulder can result only in trouble.

Amity

• • •

June 3

DEAR AMITY,

For over a week I have attempted to talk with my wife, but to no avail. She goes to work early, comes home late, and after supper barricades herself in the study. The last couple of months since she started, it seems I spend ~~more~~ more time with *Charlie's Angels* reruns than I do with her.

DEAR AMITY

119

Your answer to my first letter was so understanding.  
Tell me what to do, for I am an . . .

Irritated Husband  
Box 433  
City

• • •

June 10

DEAR IRRITATED HUSBAND,

I think you are letting your problem work on *you* rather than your working on *it*. As a woman, I can tell you that a strong man is most attractive. If your wife's work ties her up all week, plan a weekend together to get away from it all. Talk about her work with her. Make her feel important. The results could be gratifying.

Amity

• • •

June 18

DEAR AMITY,

It's too bad all women don't share your attitudes toward husband-wife relationships. I took your advice and planned a weekend for the two of us at the lake. She even agreed to go, but at the last minute something came up — HER JOB AGAIN! It seems like she always has a reason to avoid me.

Well, I went to the lake myself, got ~~home~~ bombed, and did some serious thinking. She has no right to treat me like this, and you're right — I have to do something, for I am becoming a . . .

Desperate Husband  
Box 433  
City

June 25

DEAR DESPERATE HUSBAND,

The lines of communication in your marriage are definitely down. Have you considered any alternative means of getting through to her?

I can sympathize with your frustrations. Everyone feels isolated at times. However, in these moments you must be especially careful your emotions don't get the best of you, drive you to do something unreasonable. Perhaps you should consider getting professional help.

Amity

• • •

June 26

DEAR AMITY,

Professional ~~hell~~ help? There's nothing wrong with me that getting back the girl I married wouldn't cure. I long for those days when her ~~life~~ life centered around me rather than her career. I am *strong* and I *have made a decision*. I'm going to demand she quit her job, or else!

It's time she realized ~~what~~ what I'm going through, that I have become an . . .

Irate Husband  
Box 433  
City

• • •

July 2

DEAR IRATE HUSBAND,

I think you are over-reacting. Your decision shows more selfishness than strength. You are living in the past; the world changes and people change. Your wife has a right to self-fulfillment! Don't back her into a corner! Don't force her to make a decision you both will regret.

Amity



July 3

DEAR AMITY,

I am still shaking from what has just happened. I gave my wife the ultimatum. She even seemed to know it was coming. Her reply caught me totally off-guard — I had never even considered a DIVORCE!

She's now in her inner sanctum, and I can hear that infernal typewriter chattering away.

With so little remaining for me, there is only one thing left to do, for I am now a . . .

Resolved Husband  
Box 433  
City

• • •

July 4

DEAR FRANK,

I have suspected you for some time. The weekend at the lake. Your failure to specify "your wife's" job. The ultimatum. Don't do it! Don't do it! I didn't want to believe that my career could drive you to kill your

• • •

July 4

DEAR AMITY LAURA,

It's too bad ~~they~~ that the only way we've been able to communicate is ~~on~~ on this typewriter. If only you would have been Amity in ~~real~~ real life, I wouldn't be a . . .

Bereaved Husband

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# THE WORLD OF MYSTERY FANDOM

by STEPHEN MERTZ

THE FIELD OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY has always had a large, active fan press; i.e., small journals — called “fanzines” — written, edited and published *by fans, for fans*. Some of these journals are devoted to particular authors, such as Edgar Rice Burroughs or H.P. Lovecraft, while others cover the full fantasy/science fiction genre with articles on different authors, as well as author interviews and reviews of both new and older books.

For some reason that no one has ever adequately explained, such journals did not exist for detective/suspense readers until the last few years, and judging from some of the comments in recent MSMM letter columns, many readers are still unaware of their existence — and would probably love to know about them!

With that in mind, what follows is a short annotated listing of the four primary general interest fan journals currently being published for fans of mystery and detective fiction. All four fanzines crackle with a wonderful energy and sense of kinship that can be found nowhere else. A perusal of any given issue of each of the publications listed is like walking into a roomful of mystery lovers who like nothing better than to compare notes on what they love/hate/or think about what they have read in the suspense field, and who wish to share their love and knowledge with others.

Give one or all a try and see what you've been missing:

*The Armchair Detective* (129 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019). The dean of mystery fan journals, *TAD* was founded by editor Allen Hubin in 1967 and continues to lead the field in its knowledgeable, indepth coverage of all areas of the suspense field including old

and new books, interviews and movie reviews. *TAD* has become a most professional journal over the years and, while it is sold only by subscription and in a very few mystery specialty bookshops, is of newsstand quality in both content and packaging. A one-year subscription (4 issues) is \$16.

*Mystery* (1659 Mohawk, Suite 12, Los Angeles, CA 90026) is not only the newest addition to the ranks of fan journals, but is also the only one to be marketed nationally for newsstand readers. Interviews are the strong point here, with *Mystery's* West Coast location giving them access to many of the big names in the field. Recent issues have featured conversations with such notables as Ross Macdonald, Robert Ludlum and MSMM's own John Ball. Reviews and news of new books are also featured. A one-year subscription (6 issues) is \$10.

*The Mystery Fancier* (edited by Guy M. Townsend, c/o The Courier News, Broadway and Moultrie, Blytheville, AR 72315) and *The Poisoned Pen* (edited by Jeffrey Meyerson, 50 1st Place, Brooklyn, NY 11231) are both more modest in nature, being printed via offset and stapled and mailed from the editors' homes, but both magazines more than make up for their humble appearance by offering a goldmine of information, reviews and enthusiasm in each issue that would be hard to find anywhere else.

*The Mystery Fancier* is notable for editor Townsend's ongoing, indepth appraisal of Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe series, while other contributors offer page after page of reviews and articles concerning favorite books or series characters.

*The Poisoned Pen* is distinguished by a fine series of monthly interviews with such celebrities in the field as Joe Gores and PD James, as well as being chockful of other interesting and useful information.

Subscriptions to *The Mystery Fancier* are \$9 per year (6 issues). A yearly subscription (also 6 issues) to *The Poisoned Pen* is \$8.

A final, happy point is that all four of the above journals eagerly solicit letters and all manner of reviews and articles.

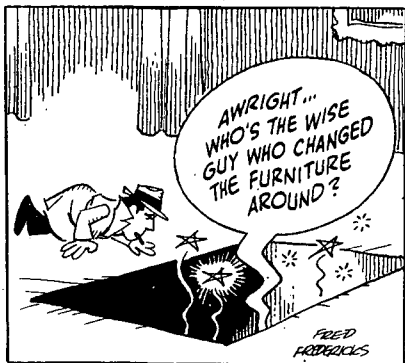
IF YOU LOVE MYSTERY FICTION (ALL OR ANY PART OF IT) and have given up trying to find friends or acquaintances who share your love (mania?), or if you simply wish to expand your circle of friends and keep up with new developments in the field, and discover new favorites, then any and all of the above publications will have something for you.

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by FRED FREDERICKS



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# STIFF COMPETITION

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL



THIS PAST MONTH HAS BROUGHT MANY NEW PUBLICATIONS to delight the hearts of mystery readers everywhere.

Heading the list is Tony Hillerman's latest, *People of Darkness*. It does not seem possible for this author to write anything other than masterpieces and he has just produced another. In case you don't already know, Hillerman has an incredible knowledge of the Indians of the Southwest, particularly the Navajo who call themselves *Dine* (The People).

Sergeant Jim Chee debuts as the detective in this new work, and a worthy successor he is to Joe Leaphorn, also of the Navajo Police, whom, we learn, has now made captain. Once again the author has filled his work with fascinating Indian lore and culture, while also giving us a top class mystery problem of a unique kind. If you are only going to read one book this month, here it is. (Harper and Row, \$9.95)



Another fine treat for mystery fans is a collection of superb short stories by Edmund Crispin. Most of these tales have never before been available in this country. No one who knows the genre needs to be told how good the author was. There are twenty-six stories in this collection and to add riches to riches, Gervase Fen appears in most of them. Particularly for bedtime reading, this collection is at the top of its class. Very highly recommended. The title is *Fen Country* and it's more than worth \$9.95.



Harder things to locate are the fine stories about Judge Dee, the medieval Chinese jurist cum magistrate. The author, the late Robert van Gulik, introduced something unique with his delightful and wise detective in whose footsteps Charlie Chan was to walk many generations later. Now Scribner's Crime Classics have reprinted two of the Judge Dee books in paperback. If you don't have them, get them and prepare for some wonderful entertainment. The titles are *Murder in Canton* and *The Monkey and the Tiger*. If you think you've seen everything in mystery literature, meet Judge Dee and find out what you've been missing. (Scribners, \$2.50 each)



Japan's famed New Tokkaido Line (the bullet train) is the setting for a new book of terrorism called *Bullet Train* by Joseph Rance and Arei Kato. The idea of holding a whole trainful of passengers as hostage is not new, but there are some twists here that are fresh and invigorating. The technical background on the operation of the bullet trains, the world's fastest, is both fascinating and accurate. There are some minor plot holes that the expert will spot, but on the whole this is a very good suspense thriller. (Morrow, \$10.95)



If you belong to that large group of readers that likes the occult and happenings on the other side of the line, then you will enjoy *The Florentine Table* by Paul Durst. There is plenty of black magic, uncanny doings, and some blood-chilling events that will keep you from sitting alone in the dark for a while. An American family, newly residing in London, finds itself suddenly mixed up in the famous case of the murdered princes in the Tower of London. And when it comes out that their two sons bear the same names as the victims of that ancient crime, the involvement becomes much deeper. There is the usual ploy of the father fighting for his family and the wife who won't believe, and some other rather well-known devices, but it all comes out a nice entertainment come full moon time. (Scribner's, \$9.95)



John Wainwright is a retired policemen who, like so many of his colleagues, has turned to writing. His latest offering is *Dominos*, a somewhat unusual book in that it is written partly in the first person, and partly in the third. The wife of a master at a girl's school in England has committed suicide under questionable conditions. This starts a feud between the master in question, the girls of the upper class, and the headmaster. The police activity is first rate, but the ending is not very satisfactory, particularly by today's standards against guilt by association. The writing is superior and if this one is a little hard to digest, we still very much want to see his next. (St. Martins, \$8.95)





The University of Pittsburgh Press has now provided review copies of three titles of major interest. Two of them are descriptive bibliographies: *Dashiell Hammett* by Richard Layman and *Raymond Chandler* by Matthew J. Bruccoli. Both of these volumes are handsomely produced on a level of scholarship that would be almost impossible to surpass. Each work described is done so in full detail and there are copious illustrations of first edition covers as well as significant later appearances of the same work.

A word should be added as the quality of the bookmaking. These volumes are part of a distinguished series, the *Pittsburgh Studies in Bibliography*. Unlike so many volumes produced today, they are bound in full cloth and the quality of the paper is excellent — consistent with reference works of permanent value. The book on Hammett is \$17.50 and worth every penny; the volume on Chandler is presumably the same. If these authors and their works are of interest to you, these fine bibliographies are essential to your library. (The University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 14260).



Also now available from the same source is *Improbable Fiction*, the life of Mary Roberts Rinehart by Jan Cohn. Mrs. Rinehart was far more than a distinguished crime writer of her day; she was also a secret agent for her country and a great many other things. She was a grand lady in the history of American literature and her well-written and engaging biography is a welcome addition. (University of Pittsburgh Press, \$16.50 in dust jacket)



For specialists in the field there is a new book about *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Charles Dickens' unfinished mystery novel that has taxed some of the best literary minds for decades. In *The Decoding of Edwin Drood* by Charles Forsyte there are two sections: The first is an account of the author's personal investigation of the Drood mystery. Almost all of the known information concerning the celebrated work is given together with the facts of Dickens' life that would appear to pertain to the writing of approximately half of the Drood book. Then, after laying a solid foundation, the author completes his work as he believes Dickens intended. It is a good solution, and an acceptable one. Is John Jasper guilty? The Shadow never tells. But you can find out for \$10.95. The publisher is Scribners. ●

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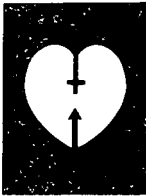
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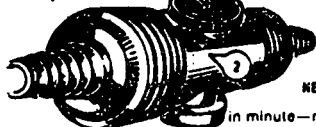
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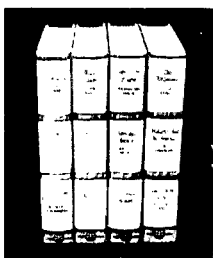
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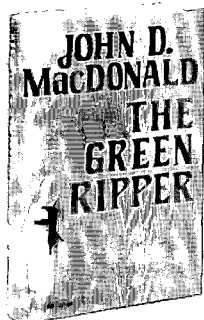
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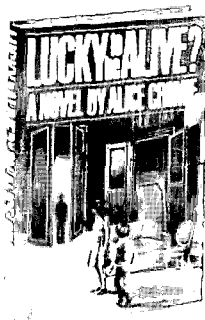
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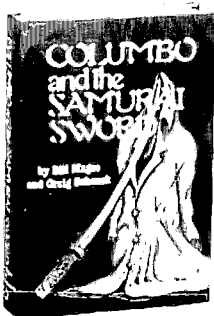
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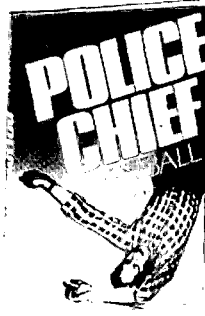
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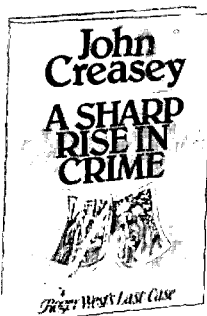
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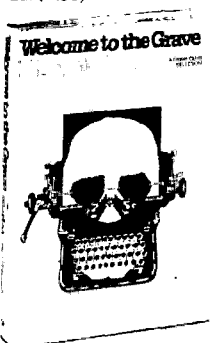
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